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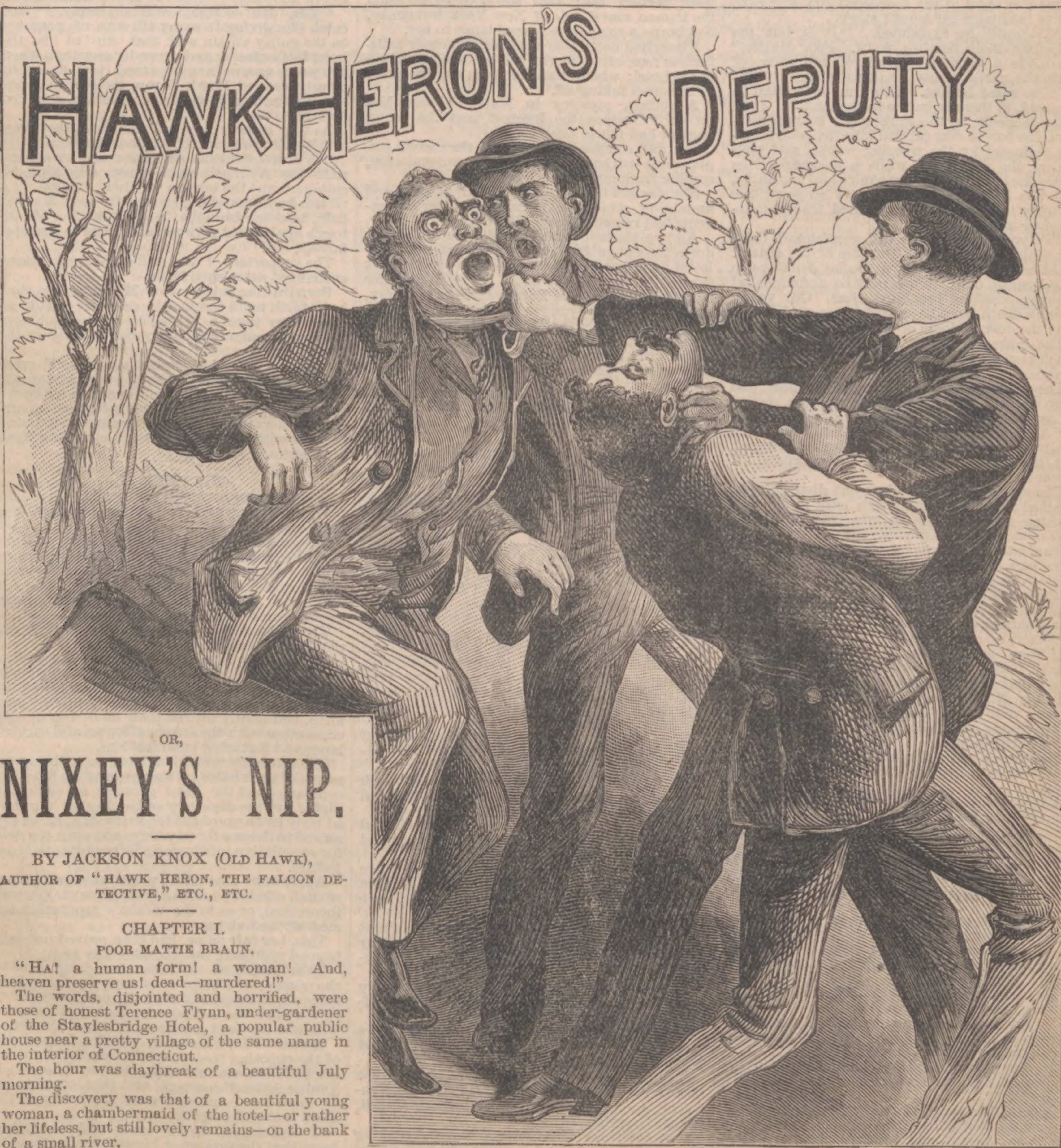
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OR, NIXEY'S NIP.

BY JACKSON KNOX (OLD HAWK),
AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DE-
TECTIVE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

POOR MATTIE BRAUN.

"HA! a human form! a woman! And, heaven preserve us! dead—murdered!"

The words, disjointed and horrified, were those of honest Terence Flynn, under-gardener of the Staylesbridge Hotel, a popular public house near a pretty village of the same name in the interior of Connecticut.

The hour was daybreak of a beautiful July morning.

The discovery was that of a beautiful young woman, a chambermaid of the hotel—or rather her lifeless, but still lovely remains—on the bank of a small river.

The spot was under a low hedge, midway between the head gardener's cottage and a dis-

THE ASSASSINS, THOUGH POWERFUL, ACTIVE MEN, WERE HELPLESS IN THAT REMORSELESS CLUTCH ALREADY KNOWN TO FAME AS NIXEY'S NIP.

used old grist-mill, whose ruinous walls and broken, weed-grown dam were visible a few rods further up the stream.

The hotel itself, a lofty, picturesque building, whose regular boarders were almost exclusively students at a neighboring medical college, was also but a short distance away, crowning a considerable bluff that afforded a wide outlook over the surrounding country.

The terrified discoverer of the crime presently mastered himself sufficiently to make a closer examination.

The poor girl had evidently made a gallant and desperate fight for life—and perhaps for honor—up to the last choking gasp.

The neck, hands and arms were bruised, the brows gathered over the closed eyes in a defiant frown.

"It's Mattie—Mattie Braun! Och! wurra, wurra! the swatest girl on the country-side, an' she widout an inimy in the wurrid!"

These were Terence's last words ere he darted away, shouting the alarm in panic-stricken tones.

Mr. Aylmer, the head gardener, a family man past the middle age, was the first to respond.

Then followed indiscriminately the student boarders and servants, for the most part hastily or but half-dressed from the hotel.

The last to arrive was Landlord Goldheim, a powerfully-built gentleman of venerable and even majestic presence.

He alone, with one exception, seemed to retain his self-possession as he joined the group about the form of the murdered girl, and gave ear to the under-gardener's story.

"Tramps!" he exclaimed. "It is but too evidently their fiendish work. Poor Mattie!" He made a significant gesture, indicative of both the girl's beauty and misfortune. "But no time must be lost. This cruel deed shall be avenged, if there is justice in the land!"

In obedience to the innkeeper's energetic orders, the corpse was carried into the hotel building, followed by the weeping women and girls among the onlookers, while a messenger was dispatched for the village squire and constable, and the boarders hurried away to scour the grounds in search of the supposed tramp murderer or murderers.

"To your work with a will, gentleman!" cried Mr. Goldheim, from the first step of the piazza. "Let each deem himself a special detective in this dreadful case. Much may be accomplished between now and breakfast time. Our young friend's death must be speedily avenged by running the doer or doers of the deed to earth!"

The innkeeper was a man of good education, much respected and liked by the majority of his boarders.

The young men responded with a cheer, and most of them, half-dressed as they were, darted off over the grounds in different directions.

"Avenged! Ay, Mr. Goldheim, not only shall the murder of Mattie Braun be avenged, but the mystery of it shall be unraveled. I swear it!"

The words, spoken in a low but distinct tone, reached only the innkeeper's ears as he was turning away, and he at once wheeled, with a sort of start, to confront the speaker.

The latter was one of the student boarders who had lingered behind the rest, and whose eyes were now fastened upon the other's face with a soul-burning gaze.

Mr. Goldheim's look of astonishment—perhaps not unmingled with fear—gave way to one of satisfaction, real or assumed.

"Your earnestness is commendable, Mr. Nixon," said he. "Surely the first grasp to close upon the murderer's shoulder should be Nixey's Nip, which has become proverbial among your associates!"

The young man bowed, and his thin, resolute lips slightly moved.

He was a pale, slender, but athletic youth, whose most remarkable characteristic was his hands.

Extraordinary hands they were; long, supple-fingered, talon-like, powerful, and on occasion, invincible in their pouncing clutch, deadly in their tigress tenacity.

He stretched forth one of them now—the right one—opening and closing it mechanically, with a half-smile on his thoughtful, non-committal lips.

"Doubt it not, sir," said he, in the same soft, abstracted tone. "Within that grip shall the real murderer of that unhappy girl, be he whomsoever he may, cringe and cower in the end! I have sworn it!"

He turned leisurely away, Mr. Goldheim following him with his eyes.

"Why do I dread that mysterious youth?" he muttered, while ascending the piazza steps. "Pshaw! but this is a superstition."

As for the young man, he returned to the spot now deserted, where the body had been found.

Here, after assuring himself of being unobserved, he folded his arms, his chin sunk upon his broad breast, and his eyes, fixed upon vacancy, reviewed the changing vistas of the past with an inward and a troubled gaze.

Brief as had been his past, it was a varied and

eventful succession of scenes which that retrospective glance took in.

It included no mother's love, no father's care in its swift but comprehensive scope.

These were blessings which his childhood had never known, or were now buried in oblivion, erased from memory's battered slate by the harsh attrition of the world.

Childhood! Had he ever known any, in the better and tenderer sense of the fragrant, bud-suggestive word?

No! A neglected street Arab's career, embracing some terrible associate-adventures with the Prince of Metropolitan Detectives, and winding up with a medical education, not yet completed, through the generosity of the same princely hands, and now, at twenty-one, on the point of graduation, with all the world before him where to choose, and his noble benefactor's kindness still to draw upon in the future.

That was all.

But no; not quite all.

A twelvemonth before the opening of our story, a beautiful girl of sixteen, a stranger, had flashed a certain look upon Bernard Nixon from amid a New York street throng, and had then vanished.

A fleeting glance—a look of mere sympathy, or perchance of girlish curiosity, and doubtless never to be renewed, never to be encountered afresh; but, nevertheless, to linger thereafter ineffaceably in his lonely heart, like a glimpse of heaven or an angel's smile!

The murdered girl, Mattie Braun, though a year or two older than the truant possessor of that perfect face, that will-o'-the-wisp amid the human marsh-tide of New York humanity, had borne a suggestive resemblance to her.

Nixon had noted this with a melancholy satisfaction soon after the girl had become an inmate of the hotel; which was about ten months prior to her cruel taking off.

A certain mystery in Mattie herself had served to deepen the interest that the young student had felt in her.

She had sought and obtained the menial employment without a solitary recommendation, coming from none knew whence.

She was not long in proving her honesty and amiability, while her reticence as to her antecedents had remained impenetrable.

And so she had passed away, with her secret, down the red path of murder, regretted and beloved by all, and unsuspecting the cause of that sympathy that had so often looked upon her from out the depths of Bernard Nixon's gloomy, memory-haunted eyes.

But is it strange that the horror of her thus passing out of sight and mind, should have stirred the impressionable bosom of the lonely student to its profoundest depth?

It was as though he had suddenly been despoiled, by a ruthless and gory but bodiless, mysterious hand, of an imperfect but sole and treasured portrait of the one idolized image of his dreams.

He had meant all along to question the girl of her past history, to sound her heart-strings, in the hope that she might have lost a sister, younger and fairer than she, yet resembling her, and that some such recollection would respond to his craving wish.

But day by day he had shrunk from the test, and now it was too late.

It was not alone as if he had lost a mirrored semblance, a faint reflection of his beloved, in the sudden extinction of this young life, but also as if the sole remaining clew that had hinted of that divine vision's identity had slipped irrevocably from his yearning grasp.

Arousing himself from his troubled reverie, the young man drew from his bosom two articles, which, unperceived, he had alighted upon near the corpse during the first excitement incident upon its discovery.

These were a torn muslin-lined envelope of large size, and a yet larger one of stiffened oil-skin that had doubtless inclosed the other.

The former was clean and blank, though much worn at the edges, as if long the closely-guarded repository of some treasured document.

The oil-skin envelope, however, bore stamped upon its face the initials M. J. B., in what had once been gilt letters.

The first and last of these, M. B., would have stood for the murdered girl's name, Martha Braun, which Nixon had imagined might have been assumed.

Having mastered this much, the student bent his stern gaze upon the hedge-sheltered river path, where the lifeless body had been discovered.

A small twig, still splashed with some ruddy drops from one of the poor lacerated hands, attracted his attention.

"Poor child!" he murmured; "she must have been freshly slain when first meeting old Terence's horrified gaze."

Obedient to a strange impulse, he plucked the blood-sprinkled spray, secured it in the inner envelope, and reinclosed this in its initial-stamped, stouter covering.

"Register me this solemn vow, Avenging Heaven!" he exclaimed in a low, fervent voice, turning his eyes aloft and pressing the package to his lips. "Until I shall have found, or mas-

tered the purport of the tell-tale paper that was of late inclosed herein, and thus discovered the true motive for this dastard crime, together with the solution of the mystery that shrouded this poor murdered girl, may dreamless sleep and perfect rest visit me no more! I have sworn it!"

Hurrying footsteps interrupted him.

As he thrust the package out of sight, several of his fellow students, with whom he was very popular, in spite of his abstracted ways, came excitedly along the path from the direction of the disused barn.

"We've got something of a clew, Nixey!" cried one of them. "Fulton has a piece of poor Mattie's dress, found in the old mill!"

"Yes," said the student named, exhibiting the morsel of dress. "She must have been murdered in the mill, and then carried out here. Ah, Mr. Goldheim was doubtless right. Tramps, curse them! But you don't seem to relish the theory, old fellow?"

There was a contemptuous curl on Nixon's lip, and he had not repressed an impatient gesture.

But they were disappointed as they gathered about him, for no hint as to his own thoughts was vouchsafed.

"Words, words, words!" he repeated sarcastically. "Ascribe it to tramps, then; where's the harm?"

As the group turned their steps toward the hotel, the young men frequently regarded Nixey with a sort of awe.

"Nixon ought to have a theory of his own worth knowing," whispered one to another.

"Yes, like enough," was the reply. "But, catch him giving it away till sure of pouncing on the guilty villain with that 'nip' of his. He must be far deeper and shrewder now than when, five years ago, as a mere street boy, he so famously assisted Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective, in hunting down Count Kotzka, the Proscribed."

As they came in front of the hotel, they were met by a fresh group of excited searchers.

"We have evidence that the murder was committed in Aylmer's wood-house, adjoining his cottage," was the burden of their report. "A ribbon-knot, matching the one in poor Mattie's hair, has been brought to light there. Pretty tough against old Aylmer, eh? And he a man of family, too!"

The supporters of the mill-and-tramp theory exchanged astonished looks.

Bernard Nixon alone—or Nixey, as we shall henceforth more frequently call him—made no other sign than a repetition of the faint, contemptuous smile that had curled his lip in the former instance.

"The squire and constable have come!" cried a fresh news monger, suddenly putting in an appearance. "And the coroner has been notified."

But, just here, the breakfast bell rung out, and the boarders lost no time in obeying its summons though with little appetite for else than fresh disclosures.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

WEEKS had passed, and the long inquest was at an end.

The sensation of "Mattie Braun's Brave Fight for Life and Honor," of "The Staylesbridge Murder Mystery," or of "The Hotel Servant-girl Murder," as the newspapers daily dished it up in one form of head-lines or another, was growing an oft-told, if not weary tale.

The mill-and-tramp theory had been duly exploited and exploded.

Three young farmers, with whom the unfortunate Mattie Braun and another young woman had been in company on the night preceding the murder, when the victim had last been seen alive, had finally proved their innocence of any connection with the crime, after painful surveillance and torturing examinations.

The total absence of testimony as to the movements of the victim between separating from her companions at the hotel grounds, at eleven at night, and the discovery of her freshly murdered body at dawn of the following day, naturally served to deepen the mystery, and open the field for speculative inference and circumstantial conjecture.

Apart from that of the young men and young woman alluded to, the only testimony taken was theoretical, or as to the victim's reputation for modesty and virtue.

This, her fair name, had been proved not only beyond reproach, but exceptionally high.

Then Landlord Goldheim had testified as to the number of tramps constantly in the neighborhood, in support of the mill-and-tramp theory in which he was seconded by the next witness, who was the head gardener, Wilfred Aylmer.

Bernard Nixon had then testified in support of the opposing theory, which was that the murder had been committed in the wood-house adjoining Aylmer's cottage, and that, consequently, some one connected with the hotel was the mere probable culprit.

He had argued his view with such analytical force that the innkeeper himself gradually gave in to it, to the relinquishment of his first theory.

Coroner and jury had followed suit, resulting

in a verdict against Wilfred Aylmer as the most likely author of the crime.

His indictment had swiftly followed, and he was now in prison awaiting trial.

Aylmer was a somewhat saturnine Englishman, who, besides being Goldheim's gardener, had been largely associated with that gentleman in the nursery business. His wife, a most estimable woman, was also the housekeeper of the hotel, the couple's only child, Janet, an attractive young woman of nineteen or twenty, assisting her. At the time of the murder the Aylmers were occupying living rooms in the basement of the hotel, pending certain internal repairs that were being made in their cottage; and the grief-stricken wife and daughter had continued to occupy them up to the present unhappy time.

Aylmer had strenuously denied his guilt, the circumstantial evidence against him was almost nil, and nothing that the clever student, Bernard Nixon, had formulated in favor of the wood-house theory had directly or indirectly pointed to the luckless gardener as the possible culprit.

Indeed, Nixey distinctly gave his private opinion to the contrary, while darkly hinting, but without charging, that a more likely culprit might be found elsewhere.

But public opinion, wearied of mystery and speculation, clamored for an arrest and indictment.

Aylmer, unfortunately, had never been a popular man. So why not he as well as, if not better than, another, to at least temporarily appease the Cerberus of public fury?

After his arrest, as a matter of course, tongues were not wanting to wag more freely to his discredit.

Goldheim himself grew suggestively reticent, or shook his head ominously at the mere mention of the prisoner's name.

His subordinates mostly took up their cue from him, like burlesque courtiers in a caricatured king's levee.

Many of the boarders and servants suddenly remembered incriminating expressions of the gardener's low estimate of feminine character in the abstract.

Miss Sophie Goldheim, the widower innkeeper's only child, had been more than once frightened, she shudderingly averred, by Aylmer looking strangely at her in lonely places.

The newspapers were pretty sure that the tribe of tramps had for once been unjustly suspected, and that the assailant in poor Mattie Braun's stereotyped "fight for her honor" had at last been scotched in the person of the miserable and all but friendless prisoner.

Almost friendless, but not quite.

His heroic wife and daughter still were devoted to him, in spite of the wave of obloquy and prejudgment already sweeping over his helpless head; and one man, Bernard Nixon, had steadfastly declared his belief in the man's innocence, and more than once sympathetically accompanied them in their visits of condolence to the prisoner in the county jail.

Meanwhile Nixon had been quietly pursuing the thread of the mystery in his own way.

The remains of the murdered girl had been rescued from a pauper's grave and buried in the village cemetery, where a modest but appropriate tablet had been erected over them with simple religious ceremonies.

Toward dusk of a warm summer day, "Nixey" was returning to the hotel grounds through pleasant rustic ways, after a holiday spent in New York, when a feminine voice was heard calling after him.

He turned to perceive Janet Aylmer, the gardener's handsome daughter, breathlessly following him up the secluded lane, and beckoning him to stop.

"Mamma and I had just got to the station from the prison," said she, pantingly, "when you got off the New York train and hurried away. It is at her wish that I have overtaken you."

"I am sorry to have given you such a run," said the student. "Anything important?"

"Yes. Three well-dressed, powerful young men followed you off the train."

"True; they sat directly behind me in the car. From such of their talk as I overheard, I set them down as newspaper reporters, or perhaps detectives."

"Mamma was sure you were unsuspecting of them."

"What do you mean, Miss Aylmer?"

"First tell me—indeed I do not ask out of impertinent curiosity—"

"Need you tell me that? Pray, go on!"

"Was your business in the great city most important—such as an enemy, or an enemy's spy, would be glad to discover?"

"It certainly was."

"Then those three men—perhaps in Mr. Goldheim's secret interest—are surely tracking you."

"What! you think so?"

"Mamma is certain of it. She saw them studying your every point—especially your hands—when your back was turned."

The student smiled, and, after his occasional habit, looked at his hands, opening and closing them suggestively in the way that had gained for

their viselike grip the expressive appellation of Nixey's Nip.

"So, said he, grimly. "Anything more?"

"Yes. As the men slunk away, perhaps to dog your steps by some unfrequented path, mamma caught sight of a revolver-butt peeping from the hip-pocket of one of them."

"Thanks for the warning, Miss Aylmer," said Nixey, after a pause. "I shall be on my guard."

"Oh, then all may be well!"

"Yet stay. Can Goldheim already suspect my secret investigations regarding his past?"

"Can you doubt it, after what has passed? He hates and fears you, and he is all-powerful hereabouts."

Nixey fell into a momentary reverie.

"But not yet so powerful," he echoed, unconsciously giving voice to his inmost thoughts, "as if the princely fortune—perhaps the murdered girl's rightful portion—were already in his ambitious grasp!"

"What is this you say?" exclaimed the young woman, astonished.

He looked up with a start, and bit his lip.

"Nothing—unintentional words!" said he, hastily. "One thing more, Miss Aylmer."

"Speak, sir."

"Have you yet gained access for me to the belongings left behind by the murdered girl?"

"Alas! not yet, though mamma and I hope to before long."

"Miss Goldheim still keeps them under bolt and bar in the hotel lumber-loft?"

"Yes; and with her enormous bloodhound, Czar, as sentinel."

"Ha!"

"But Miss Goldheim does not yet share her father's hatred and distrust of you, as you are aware."

Nixey nodded, while a shade of annoyance came upon his lip.

"If," pursued the other, "you would but respond to Miss Sophie's smiles—"

An impatient gesture interrupted the sentence.

"Well, then, if you would merely be amiable, and frankly ask her permission to look over Miss Braun's effects, it might answer."

A tremor in the speaker's voice, a drooping of the eyes, was suggestive of yet another whose smiles or sighs would perhaps have gladly found a response in the melancholy but handsome student's thoughts.

"Not to be thought of," said Nixey, abruptly.

"Apart from my unconquerable dislike for Sophie Goldheim"—Miss Aylmer's face brightened—"neither she nor her father must suspect my object in finding access to the murdered girl's belongings."

"Have no anxiety, then, Mr. Nixon. I certainly shall devise means to assist you."

Nixey colored with pleasure.

"Ah, Janet, if you could only do that much for me, I—"

He stopped as impulsively as he had begun.

Half aware of her predilection, could he honestly encourage a sentiment which, in spite of her beauty and misfortunes, could touch no answering chord in his lonely breast, wherein a single image, howsoever hopeless, was exclusively enshrined?

"It would convenience me greatly," he continued, coldly.

A sudden flush died out of the young woman's cheeks.

"I shall do my best, sir," she responded, in a low voice. "But, in the mean time, do not forget the warning you have received."

She hurried away to rejoin her mother at the station.

They were still occupying their basement rooms in the hotel building, as before indicated, and Nixey knew he could depend upon the promised co-operation.

Buried in thought, he continued his way, presently entering a strip of woods in the neighborhood of the old mill that had figured so conspicuously at the inquest.

Made aware of this, he involuntarily quickened his pace.

Then there was a suspicious movement close at hand, followed by a hurtling sound.

He was, just in time to dodge a sand-bag, hurled with tremendous force, and was at the same instant set upon by the three strangers against whom he had been warned.

One brandished a cocked revolver, the others formidable cudgels.

"He is unarmed," growled the foremost.

"Down with him!"

"No quarter!" hissed the second.

"Search him first," enjoined the pistol-bearer.

"No crown-cracking if he gives in!"

But there was little danger of Nixey giving in.

He had looked up with a low, chuckling laugh.

This had disconcerted the first onset of the ruffians.

Then, as they closed in upon him, they encountered a system of defense as extraordinary as it was unlooked-for.

The exceptional "nip" of those iron hands of his was the only remarkable prowess that had evolved into maturity out of the world-

wrestling ordeal of Bernard Nixon's street-Arab antecedents.

He fought with hands and feet, tooth and nail, while avoiding the showering hostile blows with the gliding sinuosity of a serpent, and yet in bulldog silence, save for a strange gritting of the teeth, more invincible and deadly in its suggestiveness than rattlesnake's challenge or tiger's defiance.

Crash! crash! crash! fell his trained and telling blows, without receiving one in return.

Like the spokes of a swiftly revolving wheel, they were everywhere at once.

"Shoot, can't yer?" roared one club-wielder, after a "settler" in the nose that had sent him reeling. "What is that gun in your hand for, if not to shoot?"

"No murder's in our orders, you jackass!" was the panting response. "Besides, if the three of us ain't men enough to get away with a stripling like this, why—"

The revolver went flying out of his grasp, while a mule-like kick in the midriff all but turned him inside out, the third ruffian also being simultaneously "knocked silly by an auctioneer" between the eyes.

Then the heads of two were knocked together with one hand gathering in the connecting throats as in a sheaf, while the remaining hand closed upon the third ruffian, neck and crop, with its kindred grip of steel.

The assassins, though powerful, active men, were helpless in that remorseless clutch already known to fame as Nixey's Nip.

"Make a clean breast of it, all of you!" hissed the young man through his gritting teeth. "Are ye in Goldheim's pay to track me down?"

Crash, crash! went the three heads together, as an accentuation of every syllable of the demand.

"Gi-ive me a ch-chance," gasped one, in a choking voice, "and I-I'll t-tell everything!"

"Quick, then, on your lives!" And there was a cautious relinquishment of the pressure brought to bear.

"You—you've g-got s-some d-documents," went on the confession, "th-that w-we w-were b-bribed t-to-take f-from y-you!"

"Your briber—his name? Quick!"

The villain hesitated.

He was throttled afresh, and shaken about like a rat in a bull-terrier's grip.

"H-hold on! F-for G-god's s-sake, y-young f-feller! I-I w-weaken—I-I'll p-peach!"

"Quick about it, then!" And again was the grip relaxed. "You're in the nip of Death or Mercy, as you may elect! Out with it!"

But it was too late.

"Robbery! murder!" cried a shrill voice from one end of the path. "Seek him, Czar! seek him!"

There was a deep bellowing sound, something between a growl and a roar, accompanied by the maddened rush of a huge, open-mouthed monster.

Nixey was dashed to the ground by the onset of Miss Goldheim's redoubtable Russian bloodhound.

Before he could recover, his three captives, thus unexpectedly delivered, had snatched up their scattered weapons, and taken to their heels.

CHAPTER III.

THAT NIP OF NIXEY'S.

"BLESS me, what a mistake! It's not a robber at all, but Mr. Nixon. Hold off, Czar, hold off! Down, sir! Oh, don't—don't! You'll kill my poor, dear dog!"

There was cause enough for the entreaty at the wind-up.

Recovered from the first shock of the savage brute's assault, the tables had been turned with the rapidity of thought itself.

It was now the monster that was underneath, with the terrible Nixey's Nip (double-handed this time) closing round its brawny neck like a boa-constrictor's coil.

"Oh, don't!" screamed the now-agonized young woman afresh. "It was all a mistake! For Heaven's sake, spare my dog!"

Without relaxing his deadly grip, which was fast growing fatal, Nixey turned his stern, questioning glance upon Miss Goldheim's face.

"A mistake that has cost me dear, then!" said he, coldly. "But how am I to know that it was a mistake?"

The young woman clasped her hands imploringly.

She was both handsome and graceful—notwithstanding a Gypsy-like masculinity of face, frame and movement—and her black eyes, ordinarily fierce and proud, were brimming with tears.

"I swear it!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Heavens! would I knowingly set my dog upon you—of all men in the world I most—" [A torrent of blushes surged into her dark face, crimsoning it to the temples.] "Oh, sir, I beseech you!"

Suddenly released, the dog, whimpering and vanquished, for all of his native ferocity and courage, crept painfully to his mistress's caress.

Rising, Nixey folded his arms on his breast, which betrayed not by an added heave the fierce exertions through which he had passed trium-

phantly, and contemplated the hotel-keeper's daughter with an icy yet penetrating regard that might have read her inmost soul.

"I give him to you—take him!" said he, slowly. "But I may yet repent my forbearance."

"You will not, you never shall!" exclaimed Miss Sophie, earnestly.

She was effusive in her renewed assurances of its having all been a mistake—of her having thought him a dreadful robber, bent on the murder of the three men who had been at his mercy.

He shook his head incredulously.

"Indeed—indeed it was as I say, Nixey—I beg your pardon, Mr. Bernard!"

There was a repetition of the blush.

"Your face was just demoniac at that critical instant. No wonder I failed to recognize you. Do believe me!"

"I'll try to."

"How had those men offended you?"

"No matter, since they know me at last."

As a thoughtful, abstracted look came into his face, from sheer force of habit, he stretched forth those peculiar hands of his, opening and closing them mechanically.

The young woman drew nearer, as if fascinated, her eyes glowing.

"What splendid hands!" she murmured; "how bird-like, how powerful, how terrible, and yet so beautifully shaped!"

Rousing out of his reverie, Nixey slipped one of the admired members out of sight, courteously raised his hat with the other, and passed on.

As he did so, the great bloodhound slunk out of his path, but at the same time ominously baring the glistening rows of formidable teeth.

"Stop, sir, stop!" chided the young woman, rapping the animal sharply with her sunshade. "You are to treasure no hard feelings in that quarter save at my express command."

Then her bosom heaved, and her firm, ripe lips parted as her eyes followed the retreating athletic figure, feasting on its every movement, so instinct with unconscious strength and grace.

"Heaven grant that his secret pursuit of my father prove not dangerous!" she murmured. "Else must the precious youth antagonize my cunning and my resentment, no less than my sire's. But oh, how I love him! And what a struggle would be love pitted against duty in such a case!"

Her brows knitted over her now troubled eyes, when approaching voices placed her on her guard.

She grasped the spiked collar of the dog, and dragged him into the thicket, as Janet Aylmer and her mother passed on their way home.

Sophie Goldheim's face was distorted by new and unenviable emotions.

She peered out of the copse, looking after the unfortunate mother and daughter with basilisk intensity.

"Janet loves him, too!" she muttered. "Fool! she cannot hoodwink me as to her maiden thoughts and longings, howsoever she may deceive the rest. Well, let the test proceed!"

Her eyes brightened triumphantly.

"Let it come!" she continued. "Pity if I cannot overcome her in a rivalry for Bernard Nixon's heart, especially should the black shadow of the gallows finally close over her wretched father's head—as it must, and shall! Our safety, no less than our success, demands it. And no man, howsoever love-smitten by blonde loveliness and azure eyes, would marry a newly-hanged man's daughter. Popular fury—thank Heaven and fate for its remorselessness!—will take care of that. And then—but wait; there is ever that other, that mysterious obstacle in my pathway to his heart!"

Her face was dark and troubled once more.

"Why is he so set in hunting down that girl's murderer? Here's the rub. Not that he loved her, lovely as she was, though a mere servant. Impossible! He could not have loved Mattie Braun—I watched him like a hawk when in her presence, and there was not a sign, not a token; though his eyes often dwelt moodily and dreamily upon her unconscious face. How then to account for this absorbing, this brooding intensity to fathom the mystery of her fate, to track the real murderer to retribution?"

She shuddered and turned livid, but almost instantly recovered, with a sort of revealing light breaking over her brunette features.

"Ha! Might it be that he has seen and loved that other one, whose identity we are so anxious to discover and extinguish? Impossible! By what blind chance—and yet who knows? But the secret of Nixon's fell pursuit in this entanglement of blood, gold and crime must and shall be unveiled. What those craven ruffians so ingloriously failed to discover, at my father's behest, it shall be my province to unearth. And then, when security and princely wealth crown at last irrevocably our subtle, daring plot, then let us see if he, the friendless boy, the penniless student, of the heart of gold, can resist the splendor of my position, the fascination of my smile!"

Something of the beauty of the fallen angels leaped into her face and eyes, her powerful yet graceful figure dilated as if in royal anticipation of possessing her hungering heart's desire—Ber-

nard Nixon's love—and her passionate breathing came and went fitfully.

Not venturing to follow the footpath lest she might overtake the Aylmer woman, she made a short cut for the hotel through the tangled copse, the great dog obediently following.

At last, after crossing a comparatively open space, so buried in her own dark thoughts as to but partly heed her environments, she came to a low, ragged hedge separating the field from the river-path.

Leaping the hedge with the airiness of a fawn, she suddenly recoiled with a stifled shriek, and so unexpectedly as to almost stumble over the great dog at her heels.

She had alighted, unawares, upon the very spot at which the murdered body of poor Mattie Braun had first been found.

"Vengeance of Heaven!" gasped the young woman in an appalled tone; "here, here upon this blood-stained spot once more?"

And, like a guilty, ghost-chased thing, she sped away, with her wondering canine companion at her side, whimpering and alert, as if he, too, had caught the contagion of her superstitious terror.

As for Nixey, on reaching the hotel without any further misadventure, he had gone quietly to his room and assiduously applied himself to his studies, as though nothing unusual had occurred.

These he had been careful not to neglect, even of late, when he had naturally been occupied with so many extraneous things.

It chanced to be a Saturday, when there were neither recitations nor lectures at the college, whose summer vacation was close at hand, and where Nixey was in hopes of getting his diploma at the end of the year.

From the first moment when his illustrious benefactor, Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective, had rescued him from the poverty, degradation and pitfalls of metropolitan waifdom, and began his moral and mental training, Nixey had expressed an overmastering desire to become a physician.

After receiving a fair general education in the New York public schools, it was to this end that he had for the past three years been applying himself most earnestly at the neighboring medical college, an institution of some note, and he had but just overstepped the threshold of man's estate.

But the detective instincts were already stirring in his nature, as we have seen, though perhaps he was not himself aware that they would become so dominant as to constitute a fresh turning-point in his career.

But none the less, and chiefly for the strange and romantic reasons hinted at, was Nixey determined to push forward his self-imposed and secret investigation into the mystery of Mattie Braun's murder to the bitter end.

As to his reasons for suspecting Sylvanus Goldheim, the lessee of the Staylesbridge Hotel, as the author of that crime, they will presently appear.

As we have intimated, nearly all of the regular lodgers of the hotel, some forty or fifty in number, were students at the neighboring college.

Nixey's bedroom, with a number of others, was in the rear of the second floor, and overlooked the steep side of the river-bluff, upon which the hotel sided, making a sheer descent of considerable depth.

The front part of this floor comprised the handsome private rooms occupied by Mr. Goldheim and his daughter, both of whom were possessed of rather Sybaritic tastes, in odd keeping with their position in society, though the innkeeper himself, an educated foreigner of long residence in America, was accredited with having saved a small fortune before embarking in his present business.

The floor above, besides containing a disused laboratory—the experimenting room of a former medical professor while a boarder in the hotel, was devoted to the lodging accommodations of the numerous domestics, with the exception of the housekeeper and her daughter, as already noted.

Above the third floor was an immense loft, or garret, divided into various compartments for the storage of luggage and lumber, in one of which, whose key was in Miss Goldheim's constant possession, was kept secured the few personal effects of the murdered housemaid.

An hour or two after the evening meal, at which both landlord and Miss Goldheim had been conspicuous by their absence, Nixey was still in his room.

A message was brought that Mr. Goldheim wished to see him instantly in his private parlor.

Nixey slowly raised his eyes from the book he was reading to regard the servant, tossed through the open window the half-burnt cigar he had been smoking, his only form of dissipation, and yet did not trouble himself to alter his negligent attitude.

"Say to Mr. Goldheim, with my distinguished respects," said he, slowly, "that I will obey his summons, not at this instant, but at the first stroke of midnight."

The message-bearer was a sort of green maid-

of-all-work who held both the innkeeper and his daughter in a species of solemn and majestic awe.

"Oh, sir, that would be imperent!" she gasped, after recovering from the shock of what she had heard. "I wouldn't dare, sir—"

"The responsibility is mine, not yours, Bridget," kindly but firmly interposed the student. "Report my answer to your employer just as you have received it. That will do."

Bridget evaporated as if knocked down and out with a feather.

Would the message be renewed, and more pressingly?

Weighty inferences depended on this.

Nixey continued his reading for an hour longer, but without further interruption.

"I flattered myself on just that much," said he, softly, with the smile that was so seldom seen upon his rather somber face. "The Boniface is evolving. Suspicion has become anxiety; anxiety has become apprehension. What next? That is to be seen."

He tossed his book aside, arose, carefully secured the door, blew out his student's lamp, and went to the window.

Dusk had deepened into solid dark, faintly relieved by the soft glitter of stars.

Far below lay the foot of the bluff, planted here and there with lofty trees, and checkered with no window lamp-ray from the towering wall overlooking it.

A story and a half above, equally lightless and forbidding, were the dormer windows of the attic loft.

A lightning rod, staunchly set and standing well up from its supports, ran up the side of the house within easy reach of the casement out of which Nixey leant.

It would, at first glance, have afforded a possible means of ascent for a squirrel or a monkey, but scarcely for a bulkier or less prehensile creature.

Yet Nixey reached out, and tapped the rod with a self-satisfied gesture.

Moving familiarly about the darkened room, he provided himself with two articles, a small dark-lantern which he lighted, and a keen, long, slender-bladed dirk-knife.

Securing these upon his person, he returned to the window.

Stepping out upon the narrow sill, face inward, he grasped the lightning-rod with that tenacious grip of his, and unhesitatingly swung himself out over the abyss.

Then he began to creep steadily up the blank side of the house, hand over hand, with some slight assistance from his feet and knees.

With any one else, even with a trained acrobat's expertness, the attempt would have been synonymous with speedy destruction.

With the proverbial Nixey's Nip, it was easily possible.

Reaching the rain-leader, our adventurous student crept stealthily along this narrow ledge till confronting the dormer window next the corner.

Before doing this, he had remarked a trap-door, by which the attic might also be entered, from somewhere near the center of the gently-sloping roof.

The sash of the dormer window he had reached was partly open.

Cautiously flashing a shaft of his dark lantern into the dense darkness of the interior, a low, warning growl saluted his ears.

Then two angry eyes, like fiery holes in the black mantle of the obscurity, were seen challenging his guest, and he presently made out the savage hound's bulky and muscular outline, quivering with excitement, and ready to launch itself furiously forward at the first certainty of an actual intrusion.

The dog was stationed in a long corridor, and at the secured door of the Goldheim private lumber compartment, which, from its position ought to communicate directly with the afore-said trap-door.

This perilous expedition, on the part of Nixey was more of a reconnoitering nature than anything.

Apart from the uproar it would make, to the ruin of the secrecy he wished to preserve, the young man was not long in recognizing the madness of boldly entering the corridor and engaging in a hand-to-hand struggle with such a formidable canine guardian in the darkness, which his bull's-eye lantern could but imperfectly illuminate.

He accordingly reclosed the window, and, crouching on all-fours, fixed his attention on the trap-door as offering him perhaps a better opportunity of gaining access to the coveted interior.

As he crouched there looking at it, the trap was slowly raised from within.

Then a female form, first the head and shoulders, then the entire white-draped figure, indistinctly outlined against the star-studded firmament, came into view.

"It must be Sophie Goldheim, keeping watch above, while her dog performs a similar duty below," was Nixey's first thought, instantly to be dismissed, however, upon a closer study of the figure, which was less robust than that young woman's.

Just then the apparition, which seemed to be taking its airy bearings in a disappointed way, chanced to observe the student's crouching figure.

A frightened exclamation burst from her lips. It was responded to by an astonished and eager one, on the part of Nixey, who had recognized the voice.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME THRUSTS.

"WHAT, Janet—Miss Aylmer! can it be you?"

Recognizing him, in her turn, the young woman cautiously approached the speaker.

"So, Mr. Nixon, I would, after all, have been anticipated," said she, regretfully. "But it is no matter, since I have been foiled, as doubtless you perceive."

"What do you mean? Ah, I see. You would have entered the store-room by means of the trap?"

"Yes."

"And all for my sake?"

Janet hung her head.

"I—I thought it might convenience your search into the mystery," she murmured.

"You are as brave as you are generous!"

There was enough starlight to betray the flush of pleasure on her fair cheeks.

"I am glad you think so."

"Then you must have descended into the store-room."

"No. There is a second trap-door, but a few feet below the upper one, and secured beyond the hope of forcing it."

"So you were baffled from above, as I was below." And, to Janet's astonishment, Nixey related his manner of ascent. "But how in the world did you get on the roof?"

"By a more feasible mode than yours. Come around to the other side and I will show you. It is, moreover, less dangerous footing on that side."

He followed her across the roof, when she pointed out a fire-escape by which she had made the ascent from the basement wall.

"Ah, I perceive!" said Nixey. "Of course I knew of this ladder, but did not venture to use it for fear of being observed."

"Yes; there are numerous lighted windows on this side, but I think I managed to slip up unobserved."

"And all to oblige me," he repeated. "You are very kind."

She made no answer, but her blush was more unmistakable than before.

"Come here in the shadow of the chimneys," said Nixey. "Let us hold a council of war."

When they had slightly shifted their position, he continued:

"As you are aware, it may be of vital importance that I should examine the murdered girl's effects."

"Had I not known it," said Janet, in a low voice, "would I have made this attempt to reach them?"

"Noble girl! Well, let us consider. Are you sure the trap-doors communicate directly with the compartment in which those effects are stored?"

"Perfectly sure. I have often been up and down the connecting ladder before that portion of the loft was partitioned off."

"Good! Do you think I could force the under trap-door, with the necessary tools?"

"It might be worth the trial."

"I will tell you what we'll do," said Nixey, after a pause. "It is now quite late, and nearly every one is gone to bed. If you could procure two or three tools for me—but wait. I had better make an examination first, to see what may be required, and then—"

Her hand fell on his shoulder with a warning touch.

Shrinking yet closer to the chimney, Janet was pointing tremulously to the trap-door, out of which another feminine figure had just cautiously issued.

Nixey checked an exclamation of surprise.

It was Miss Goldheim herself, and a gun was in her hands.

They could mark the glisten of its polished barrel in the starlight.

Janet was trembling like a leaf.

"She is a dead shot," she whispered. "We are lost!"

"Not yet," was Nixey's collected reply. "If she suspects our presence, the secret of our identity must be preserved at all hazards."

He forced her into a crouching attitude, and began leading the way behind the outer edge of the chimney to the perilous footing of the water-leader.

But just then Miss Goldheim advanced a step toward the top of the fire-escape, under the lee of which they were slipping away.

"Who's there?" she called out, in a perfectly clear, unshaken voice. "Answer, or I fire!"

She brought the gun to her shoulder with the sang froid of an old grenadier.

"Courage!" whispered Nixey, with his fair companion in his powerful grasp, and still gliding away. "Leave it all to me."

Then came the report of the fire-arm, its load

of birdshot whistling unpleasantly near their heads.

But by this time Nixey, still with Janet like a doll in his grip, was gliding swiftly along the line of the leader.

"Speak out, for I know you're there!" again called out Miss Goldheim, still intent upon the fire-escape, and they could hear her reloading the gun. "Prowlers are unwelcome here. Reveal yourself, or you're a dead man! This time, I shoot to kill!"

The challenge being disregarded, the deadly tactics were again brought into requisition.

But, fortunately, the weapon this time missed fire.

This occasioned fresh delay, during which Nixey, with his living burden, had skirted the edge of the roof half-way round, and got back to his lightning-rod.

Janet had been half-beside herself with terror during this dizzy circuit, but had luckily remained motionless in the young man's grasp.

"Heavens!" she murmured; "you cannot surely carry me down that rod—a mere thread?"

"I can and shall," was the collected reply. "Link hands under my chin, and freeze to my back. There; now we are all right."

Thus burdened, his hands were, nevertheless, nipping the rod with the tenacity of pinchers; and, as the two heads disappeared below the edge of the roof, a second shot was heard.

This was presently followed by a cry of rage, from which the fugitives could guess of Miss Goldheim's astonishment and chagrin at advancing upon the fire escape only to find that side of the roof deserted.

"Keep cool!" whispered Nixey, now half-way down to his own window-ledge, and seeming to feel his way down the wall with the ease of a lizard. "She won't dream of the rod here being available until too late to discover us."

"I should think not!" murmured Miss Aylmer, in an appalled tone. "Neither would any one else."

It seemed to her that any instant might precipitate her into the abyss, and yet the clock-work, hand-over-hand descent went on as securely and steadily as if the result of some perfectly-designed mechanism.

At length the window was reached, and Nixey managed to transfer both his burden and himself into the interior of the room with comparatively little difficulty.

Then, to relight his student's lamp, and politely open the door for his strangely-arrived guest's departure to the head of the staircase, without a compromising instant of delay, was the work of but another moment.

Janet was standing there as pale as a sheet, and yet regarding him with a wondering, mystified look.

"Is it possible that this quiet-mannered young man can have performed that desperate feat?" she was saying to herself. "He must be of iron—of gutta-percha and steel!"

Then with a swift blush crimsoning her pallor, she turned, and darted away.

Nixey closed the door, resumed his book, and patiently waited.

In half an hour, when all the house was hushed, he detected the sound of stealthy footsteps in the passage.

They came to a pause at his door.

The student listened.

"Miss Sophie Goldheim on a mission of discovery!" he thought. "Much good may it do her!"

He coughed, yawned, turned a few pages with a rustling sound, and waited.

But nothing came of it, and the steps were at length heard retreating as stealthily as they had come.

After another and longer pause, Nixey looked at his watch, a cheap one of American make, but a splendid timekeeper.

It was five minutes to twelve.

With another smile, he quietly arose, and quitted the room.

As the ornolu clock on Landlord Goldheim's parlor mantle-piece rung out the first stroke of the midnight hour, the student, after a knock for admittance, stepped into that gentleman's presence.

Mr. Goldheim's personality—his muscular, stately frame, and imposing, even majestic demeanor—have been briefly alluded to.

He was reading, or pretending to read, at his dignified ease, in a resplendent dressing-gown and gorgeous Turkish smoking-cap, though tobacco was not one of his indulgences.

He waved his visitor to a seat, with a grand air and a sort of ironical smile.

"You are on time, Mr. Nixon," said he. "By the way, are you accustomed to be so cavalierly in response to a request for an interview?"

Nixey subsided into the best chair in the room, with the exception of the one filled by the lordly master of the house.

"That depends, sir," he replied, with profound respectfulness.

Mr. Goldheim made a gesture of impatience.

"I am not used to putting up with such assumption, sir."

"I neither assume nor presume, sir."

Mr. Goldheim, as was his habit when irritated

mumbled an expletive in German, but controlled himself with an effort.

"Why have you wished to see me at this unseemly hour?" he asked, abruptly.

"But why unseemly, Mr. Goldheim? This, or a later one, was not amiss to the cowardly murderer of Mattie Braun."

The innkeeper started as if stabbed in the back, and he grew livid, but at once flashed a furious look upon the student.

"How dare you?" he exclaimed. "Would you venture to connect me with that crime?"

"That remains to be seen."

The innkeeper fairly bounded from his chair, and advanced upon the presumptuous youth with blood in his eye.

He was a muscular man, accustomed to overawe his young boarders in a measure by his mere presence, but something in the cold, contemptuous glance of Bernard Nixon at this instant apprised him that his lofty, domineering methods were no longer of avail in this quarter, at least.

"Arnold Wolfgang, compose yourself," said Nixey, quietly. "It is not well to be excited."

The innkeeper recoiled, but with a positively fiendish look in his eyes.

"Hold on, if you please," continued Nixey, before the other could resume his seat. "Were it not well to look to the doors? Even your daughter's chance intrusion, spite of the unseemliness of the hour, might not be altogether agreeable—to you, at least."

"You are right," said the other.

The study contained two doors, both of which he proceeded to fasten.

Then he returned to his seat, with something savagely suggestive in his forced composure, as much as to say: "Now I've got you to myself, beyond your power of escape. Let us have this thing out, and welcome."

It may be observed, parenthetically, that Mr. Goldheim had had no practical knowledge of that physical characteristic of our hero's, already notorious among his fellow-students and others as Nixey's Nip.

"Come, sir," said Mr. Goldheim, with a harsh, dropping-of-the-mask sort of manner; "explain the meaning of your late and present conduct, and have done with it."

"If you mean my interest in the murder of poor Mattie Braun, sir," said Nixey, quite cheerfully, "I am with you at once. In fact, that is the occasion of my being here."

"Explain, explain, then! Begin at the beginning, from the very first of your preposterous intermeddling with this tragic affair."

"With pleasure, sir; but why preposterous, if you please?"

"By reason of your own unfortunate situation in life, sir. That of a wretched charity-pupil at the neighboring college—a dependent on the rich Mr. Hawk Heron's bounty, and with no boast of extraction beyond the New York gutters from which you were snatched by the sarcasm of destiny."

"It really grieves me, sir," was the composed response, "to find you such a calumnious liar at your time of life."

It was probably the answer which the studiously insulting aspersion had intended to provoke.

With another bound from his chair, the powerful innkeeper this time precipitated himself headlong upon the imperturbable youth.

Spite of having overstepped the threshold of middle age, he was a man of vast physical strength, with sufficient activity and brute courage to second it ably.

His flushed face was distorted with ungovernable fury, one hand grasped a keen-bladed ink-eraser, the other a heavy ebony ruler, hastily snatched from the writing-table at which he had been sitting, and his frantic rush was formidable in the extreme.

Nixey did not move a muscle till his would-be assailant was almost upon him, and then only to reach up his open hands, and to glide like a shadow to one side.

Then there was a lightning-like twinkling of those extraordinary hands, in and out from among the violent but fruitless blows that fell about him.

Then there was an end.

The ruler had flown one way, the ink-eraser another, and the publican was once more seated in his own chair.

But he was also panting and helpless, each of his wrists being clasped by a redoubtable grip as in a blacksmith's vise, and crushed back so violently against his chest that he could scarcely breathe.

"Really, Mr. Goldheim, but you are imprudent!" said his conqueror, in a gently deprecating tone. "What would your boarders say at seeing you thus surrender yourself to an access of rage? Let me beseech you to calmness."

He relaxed his grip, and quickly resumed his seat.

Mr. Goldheim drew a long breath, shook out his hands limply, as if to assure himself of there yet remaining a whole bone in the wrists, and regarded the young man with an astounded expression.

At length, however, he recovered his self-pos-

session, and there was a strange furtiveness in the half-respectful, half-malignant glance of his eyes.

"Why did you call me Arnold Wolfgang?" he growled out.

"Because such was your name when you were a fellow-conspirator with that prodigy of crime, Count Kotzka, the Proscribed, some years ago."

Goldheim bowed his head, as if to thoroughly collect his thoughts.

"Granting the truth of what you charge," said he, "why do you bring it up to me now?"

"Why did you cast a slur upon my position here but a moment ago?" was the counter-question.

Mr. Goldheim bit his lip in silence.

"Barring the good extraction, which I make no claims for, you must know that that slur was undeserved and cowardly. I am no charity student at the neighboring institution, as you are well aware. The rich Mr. Heron, now abroad, justly considers it but fair play that he should be my patron, because of the signal services rendered him at my boyish hands, in a great detective case of five years ago, and I have accepted that patronage as my just due."

"I apologize."

"Sir, your apology is accepted. But I don't want you to think that I threw up your past merely in a weak spirit of irritation or reprisal. It was not so, but only to show you that I am better informed than you have imagined. Moreover, I, for one, am not ashamed, but rather glory in my ignoble extraction, in the contrast it affords to my present well-being, comparatively speaking. It is the truly democratic, the truly American sentiment, and every American should second it. It is your own fault, if you are ashamed of your own past."

"But I am not," said Mr. Goldheim, after a reflective pause. "I would merely prefer to have it ignored. There was nothing personally criminal in that past, notwithstanding its unfortunate entanglement with the career and affairs of one of the greatest and worst of criminals."

"At that time, perhaps not," was interposed in a just audible voice.

Mr. Goldheim pretended not to hear.

"Since then, I have redeemed my past in that unfortunate connection," he went on. "I have at last succeeded in establishing myself in the business of hotel-keeping, which is as reputable as any other in this country."

"All honor to you as far as that goes."

"But am I not justified in now ignoring my unfortunate antecedents especially for my daughter's sake?"

"Yes; if your conduct of life has been blameless in the interim?"

Mr. Goldheim sprang to his feet, and paced the floor with renewed perturbation.

"Has it been otherwise?" he cried. "Boy—young man! what more can you know against me?"

"In a general, or particular way?"

Mr. Goldheim stared.

"Humph! Well, first then, in a general way?"

"You are still secretly connected with your old dangerous associates, in a far more terrible game, and under another name. Now they call themselves Anarchists."

Mr. Goldheim dropped again into his chair, regarding the speaker with mingled terror and astonishment.

"They are the enemies of law, order and domestic virtue—the sworn foes of our common country!" the young man went on. "Their infernal propaganda is illustrated by the recent scenes of riot and bloodshed in Chicago. Their instruments are the incendiary's torch, the assassin's dagger, the secretly-devised, cowardly-thrown dynamite bomb! They are the offshoots of European disorder, crime, fanaticism or squalor, seeking to sully our fair land with their demoniac principles. You, Mr. Goldheim, are in constant secret correspondence with their leaders!"

The perspiration was pouring down the innkeeper's face in streams.

"It is false, false, false! this you cannot prove," was all he could murmur through his trembling lips.

Nixey went on remorselessly.

"Whether or not your daughter is your fellow-conspirator in this dastard plotting against the benign institutions that shelter and caress you, is a matter of her own conscience. Whether or not the chemical laboratory up-stairs during its owner's absence, has been used by you, in the secret manufacture of explosive bombs, for the use of those fiendish outcasts, is something I am, as yet, not sure of. Mr. Goldheim, with your permission, I will light a cigar."

He did so, the publican in the mean time helping himself to a long pull at a flask of schnapps, which he took from a drawer of his writing-table, and raised to his lips with a trembling hand.

Then the two sat regarding each other for some moments in profound and impressive silence.

But there was one in an adjoining room, who had intently witnessed (through a private peephole) and overheard every iota of this remarkable interview, and who was by this time agitated by conflicting passions as terrible as those that raged in Goldheim's laboring breast.

Needless to say that this was Sophie Goldheim.

Here at last was the awful contention between love and duty that she had so dreaded, and yet prognosticated.

In this brief truce of silence between the verbal duelists, she withdrew for a moment from her post of observation, throwing herself wildly in a luxurious fauteuil.

It was a small room—a sort of boudoir to the larger sleeping apartment into which it directly opened—but sumptuously furnished with every article that an æsthetic, or even Oriental, taste could suggest.

The occupant wore a cherry-trimmed white satin robe de chambre, of exquisite cut and elaborate needlework, whose clinging folds set off her powerful yet womanly figure to the most fascinating advantage.

Her abundant black hair, fine and lustrous, gave an oread suggestiveness to her rich brunette beauty by being partly unbound, and falling in great snaky loops and coils over the statuesque neck and shoulders.

Her bosom was tumultuously aheave, her glorious black eyes now blazing with fierce excitement, now swimming with angry tears.

"Heavens!" she murmured, wildly, "it has come at last—the test, the cruel test! My love or my duty—my father or the man I love—which shall claim the loyalty of this tortured heart?"

She gnashed her teeth, her breath coming and going fitfully.

"If I were but sure of winning his love!" she went on. "But am I sure of it? No, no, apart from Janet Aylmer there is still that other—that nameless, mysterious other! Were it otherwise, were I sure of winning him, would I not sacrifice all else—my father's honor, nay, his very life—upon the altar of that burning, that adored devotion? Alas! I fear so."

She buried her face in her hands, her form convulsed, but in silence.

Presently she looked up, with an iron resolve fixing itself firmly along the lines of her tempestuous, darkly-beautiful face.

"First I shall satisfy myself on this point—I swear it!" she continued in her voicing thought. "If his heart is still in a measure free, then welcome exposure, degradation, death itself, as Goldheim's portion and my own, so that I but one day revel in Bernard Nixey's peerless love! If—if I discover that he really loves another—that my chances for his favor are irrevocably hopeless, then welcome the reverse for him—my father's vengeance, the Anarchist's frenzied hatred, the deadly price of his intermeddling in this murder case, and howsoever soon I care not!"

Here the resumption of the voices in the adjoining room recalled her to her post of espionage and eavesdropping.

CHAPTER V.

GOLDHEIM AT BAY.

"ANYTHING more?" suddenly demanded Mr. Goldheim, rousing himself out of the painful abstraction in which he had been momentarily plunged. "Not that I acknowledge the truth of your absurd charges, but—what more, young man, would you urge against me?"

"Nothing more, in a general way, sir."

"Well, then, in a particular way?"

"Good! or let us say in connection with the murder of Mattie Braun."

Again Mr. Goldheim almost lost his self-control.

"Are you insane upon this subject?" he exclaimed, with a rasping laugh.

"On the contrary, I consider my head to be particularly level in just this regard."

"Your self-sufficiency, young man, is phenomenal. Wilfred Aylmer is awaiting his trial for that awful crime."

"Which he did not commit."

"That is yet to be proven."

"True."

"But, whether Aylmer is proved guilty or acquitted, how could you possibly connect me with this crime of outrage and murder?"

"Murder pure and simple, if you please. There was no outrage."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. There was no outrageous assault preceding the murder."

"You rave. The contrary was testified to by two physicians at the inquest."

"Both foreigners—both in secret sympathy with the Anarchist conspirators, and both your intimate friends and well-wishers."

"Preposterous!"

"You say so."

"The girl was beautiful."

"Granted."

"What other motive could have instigated her taking off?"

"Cupidity."

The innkeeper started, and then stared even harder than before.

"Surely you have taken leave of your senses!" he exclaimed.

"Not yet."

"Cupidity!" repeated Goldheim. "Why,

man alive! besides being practically nameless and friendless, the girl was without a dollar in the world."

The answer brought with it the greatest shock he had thus far sustained.

It came cold, clear, pointed, as if barbed with steel and venom-tipped.

"She was co-heiress, with a younger sister, as yet undiscovered, of the vast English estate of Jeremiah Jekylls, recently deceased, valued at four hundred thousand pounds, or two million dollars—roughly estimated!"

After his first bewilderment, real or pretended, over this remarkable statement, Mr. Goldheim burst into an hysterical laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he cried. "You will excuse my smiling so audibly, but—it is too much! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your mirth, sir, is wholly hypocritical," said Nixey, sternly.

"Indeed! Then let me express my unalloyed astonishment."

"You have none to express."

"How?"

"You have been perfectly aware of this since—"

The young man paused, fixing his glance upon the other with glittering intensity.

"Since—since when?" stammered Mr. Goldheim.

"Since the day preceding Mattie Braun's murder!"

The publican fell back in his chair in a species of collapse, but his force of character was prodigious, and he was speedily himself again.

"Very romantic, indeed!" said he. "And you argue that I was aware of all this?"

"I know you were."

"And by what means?"

"By this advertisement."

Nixey drew from his pocket a New York newspaper, of the date indicated, selected a marked "Personal" advertisement, and read it aloud as follows:

"HEIRS WANTED—To the estate of Jeremiah Jekylls, deceased, of St. George's Place, Portland Square, London, W. Mr. Jekylls is thought to have left an only child, Mrs. Mary Jekylls Braunfels, a widow, who emigrated to Chicago, U.S.A., fifteen years ago, with her two young daughters, after incurring her father's displeasure, and has not since been heard of."

"Any information of the whereabouts of the aforesaid Mary Jekylls Braunfels, or of her heirs, will be liberally paid for by the undersigned. Address,

"SLOAT & JOHNSON, Solicitors,

"Lincoln's Inn, London."

"Or their American representatives,

"CROSSWISE & SHORTCUT, Attorneys,

"Borel Building, Broadway, N. Y."

"Where and when did you obtain that advertisement?" inquired Goldheim, with assumed indifference.

"In New York to-day," was the reply. "I have been busily engaged in New York for a number of days since the murder," Nixey continued.

"Very likely. And you wisely infer that I was acquainted with the advertisement on the day of its appearance?"

"It is the *Herald*, your regular metropolitan newspaper."

"Which is, of course, an incontestable proof that I daily master every line of advertising in its columns?"

"Your irony is wasted upon me, sir."

"Still, you have intimated that I was necessarily familiar with this particular advertisement."

Nixey took counsel with himself, and then decided on "bluffing it," as it is called.

"I do intimate that," said he, with commendable coolness and audacity. "I can prove it in a court of law, if called on to do so."

The shot told.

Goldheim paled visibly, but he had now himself well in hand.

"Well, what of it?" said he.

"More than you think for, perhaps. I have this day also consulted briefly with the attorneys, Crosswise and Shortcut."

"Indeed! And to what end?"

"To the making of an important discovery."

"What was that?"

"That you had also consulted them with regard to the advertisement previously. To be more exact, on the day of its first appearance—on the day preceding Mattie Braun's assassination. Let us not forget to keep that coincidence in view. It is the jutting rock, the distinguishing landmark in our series of incriminating pictures."

"As you choose in that regard, though your statement, like its predecessors, so far as they concern me personally, is simply, distinctly and unqualifiedly false."

"Its truth can be proved."

"Can it?"

"On occasion, yes."

"How?"

"That is my affair. You consulted with the lawyers; though not in your present character."

"Ah!"

"You were disguised. Or rather, it was in the resumption of your old and true character of Arnold Wolfgang—the bluff, surly, nihil-

istic character in which you served Kotzka, the Prescribed, of old—in which you presented yourself to the lawyers, to obtain the particulars of the Jekylls' millions, and the terms of the inheritance."

"You are interesting, if decidedly original."

"I am glad you find me so."

"And you have intimated that the girl, Mattie Braun, was one of the missing heirs?"

"She was."

"How, then, would her death have benefited me?"

"By enabling your daughter to personate her and inherit in her stead."

"But how?"

"You had married the unfortunate widow, Mary Jekylls Braunfels, under your real name of Arnold Wolfgang, soon after her arrival in this country, fifteen years ago. You yourself were a widower at the time, with one child, your present daughter, then two years old. Your second wife's children by her first marriage were two daughters—Martha, five, and Angela, two years old. You were aware of your second wife's wealthy paternity, and married her in the hope of her father one day relenting toward her. Failing in this, your harsh treatment drove her into the grave in less than a twelvemonth. The mother having been thus disposed of, the defenseless daughters were to be got rid of. They were first systematically drilled into familiarizing themselves with an abbreviation of their surname, calling themselves Braun in lieu of Braunfels. They were then heartlessly abandoned to public charity, the elder in Chicago, the younger in St. Louis."

Mr. Goldheim had grown frightfully calm, listening like a man of marble.

"Go on," said he, as the young man paused for breath, and the narrative was resumed:

"After this you went to a Western hospital, during the prevalence of a fatal epidemic. There you secured the death certificates of two pauper female children, newly dead, under the true names and ages of those abandoned. The birth-record of your own daughter Sophie was then so altered as to make her out two or three years younger than her real age, and the daughter, by you, of the second wife. She was old enough to know better, but, early dazzled by the possibility of ultimately possessing great wealth as her reward, readily lent herself to the deception. Then you moved East, to await the old man Jekyll's death, and then laying claim to his millions through your daughter, as the last and only heir of Mary Jekylls Braunfels Wolfgang, voiceless and defenseless in her unhappy grave."

"How circumstantially you have got it all down! But don't let me interrupt you."

"Your plans were necessarily modified by fate and circumstance. Jeremiah Jekyll was in no hurry to die, and from what you knew of his temper, you dared not come forward as the second husband of his discarded daughter until after his death. Her first marriage had been an elopement with her music-master, a composer of genius, but improvident and poor. Her second, with an adventurer like yourself, was even less likely to propitiate the crabbed old Londoner's forgiveness, even with the pretty little bogus granddaughter as a peace-offering. You prudently held your peace."

"Ha, ha, ha! Doubtless just as I am now doing, while listening to your extraordinary story."

"But, in the mean time, you were poor, besides being dangerously mixed up with the foreign revolutionists—foreign adventurers, for the most part poorer and more reckless than yourself. Still you struggled on—now as a court interpreter, now as a teacher of languages, now as a piano-tuner, but always with that dream of ultimate wealth as your pilot star—uncomplainingly, even bravely, with an enthusiasm and fortitude worthy of a better and nobler aim."

"Thanks, thanks! Your encomium is truly affecting!"

"Then came your entanglement with Kotzka and his attendant crimes. The *chute* of that monster almost involved you in his ruin. But a fortunate leniency on the part of his prosecutors, together with a lucky windfall in the Havana Lottery, proved your rehabilitation. Your change of name to the one you now bear was more or less compulsory. But your windfall enabled you to lease this hotel property, and you have been moderately successful here; though your lease will shortly expire, enabling you to embark in any fresh enterprise, such for instance as you are now contemplating—that of establishing your false claim to the Jekylls' millions."

"That position at last was yours which, barring your dream of those millions, you had not known since your exile from your native Bohemia—comfort, competence, immunity from pecuniary distress and care. With content and wisdom, you might have been happy now, saving some ghosts of the past, which might not have troubled your conscience greatly, since it is not a super-sensitive conscience, but the reverse. But the golden dream remained intact—to tempt, to lure, to dazzle—perhaps to destroy!"

"Ah! the dream, the dream! Still the dream, eh?"

"Exactly. It was destined to be revived, or, rather, revived, through an unexpected dread. One of the ghosts of the past reappeared, and by the merest accident—let us say, fatality."

The hotel-keeper moved uneasily in his seat, but attempted no further satirical interpositions.

"Martha Braunfels, calling herself Mattie Braun, engaged herself as a servant here. Chance had cast her lot among humble but honest people, and she had been reared as a domestic. To all appearances the memory of her childhood and rights had been effaced from her mind, if indeed the latter had ever been distinctly impressed thereon. Not so with those who received her here. Her resemblance to her dead mother was striking. Both you and your daughter recognized her on the instant, and doubtless marked her for destruction, should the occasion arise—that occasion being the death of Jeremiah Jekylls, and the consequent demand of his eloquent millions for their rightful heirs. Perhaps I am wrong in including your daughter in the intentions I ascribe to you. For the sake of womanhood, I hope that I am."

"Go on! go on!"

There was something feverish in the interruption.

"The occasion, or contingency, did arise—your first notification of Mr. Jekylls' death. The consequent stroke fell as if by a pre-determined signal. The night or early morning following, Mattie Braun was murdered."

Mr. Goldheim's next words, after a period of solemn silence, were a surprise to Nixey.

"Tell me honestly, sir," said he, with a reproachful dignity of voice and manner, "if you deem me capable of having killed her."

CHAPTER IV.

NIXEY AND THE INNKEEPER.

NIXEY hesitated.

"I do not say that you murdered her," said he, at length. "That remains to be proven."

"By whom?"

"By me, to my own mind, first. In the mean time, you cannot deny that I have made out a stronger motive for the crime against you than can possibly be urged against your—your intended scapegoat, Wilfred Aylmer, now in prison for the crime."

"Listen," said Mr. Goldheim, with increased calmness. "You are wrong there. Wilfred Aylmer is not my scapegoat, but the victim of circumstances. I have all along believed him guiltless, and determined that, come what may, he shall never be convicted when placed on trial."

"See to that, Mr. Goldheim. It will be well for you to do so."

"I shall see to it. Now let me acknowledge freely that your story, in many of its features, is substantially correct. How in the world did you master the details of what you have told me?"

"By long and patient investigation, by frequent visits to New York, by extensive correspondence, and by many personal inquiries, always carefully veiled. I think I have a special talent for this sort of thing—for detective work, as it is mostly called."

"You have, undoubtedly. Your story is also incorrect in but one particular. Sophie is really my daughter by my second wife. Though looking older, she has in reality just overstepped the threshold of her nineteenth year."

Nixey made an incredulous gesture, but Mr. Goldheim went on:

"It is as I tell you, and can so be proved. She is the true half-sister of Angela Braunfels (if the latter be yet alive) and, being Mary Jekylls Braunfels's daughter by me, is of necessity co-heir to the great fortune. If Angela is dead without issue, Sophie is the sole heir thereto."

"You confess to having abandoned the orphan sisters in the heartless manner I have charged?"

"I do—with shame and humiliation I confess it! I was desperately poor at the time, but that is no excuse for me. That one heartless act has remained the haunting horror of my life!"

His emotion, real or pretended, seemed truly pitiable.

"You will acknowledge, though," said Nixey, "that a powerful motive has been presented by me for you to have committed the murder?"

"At first glance, yes. Your difficulty is that you preconceive me blacker than I really am. True, both my daughter and I recognized Martha Braunfels on her unsuspecting return to our protection."

"Why did you not acknowledge her at once?"

"She was content in her sphere. Moreover, we were content to wait."

"For what?"

"For notification of the grandfather's death. It came. I did at once consult with the Broadway lawyers, as you have charged."

"But in disguise."

"No; merely in resumption of my old self, such as I had been when a husband."

"Your object in consulting the lawyers?"

"To discover if Angela Braunfels's whereabouts were known."

"But you did not tell them of Martha being found."

"No; but I intended to fetch her and Sophie to their office on the following day, and present them as two of the three heirs. I was to break the glad news to Martha the next morning as a dazzling surprise. You know the rest. The break of day found her murdered!"

Mr. Goldheim buried his face in his hands.

"My sole motive was to restore her to her own," he presently went on. "Her violent, her mysterious death intervened. Might I not have left her in her ignorance, if I were as black as you have depicted me? Would not both she and Angela have probably remained unrescued from obscurity—the same as dead—leaving my daughter the sole heir? Why, then, should I have killed the girl, whom I might have simply left to her ignorance of her rights?"

"Because," suddenly thundered Nixey, "she could not have remained in ignorance of her rights! Death alone could have silenced her claims, and here was the master motive of her taking off!"

He produced the oilskin envelope, stamped with the initials M. J. B. and flaunted it in Mr. Goldheim's face.

"The contents of this empty receptacle was that poor girl's treasure, the robbery of which cost her her life! It contained documents, given into her childish keeping by her mother, establishing her identity, and her claim to her grandfather's millions, should he die. Angela, the younger orphan, bore similar proofs upon her person. You knew of their existence, but forgot to despoil the children of their paper birth-right, so to speak, until too late—until after their heartless abandonment. You tried to recover them, that you might rectify the oversight. But they had disappeared. Martha again fell into your clutches. This time there was no oversight. She was murdered that she might be robbed and silenced!"

The iron nerves of the innkeeper still sustained him, though it had undergone the hardest wrench of all.

"This is simply preposterous," said he, with pitying calmness. "Where did you obtain those envelopes?"

"By the murdered body, soon after its discovery. They were rifled of their contents, as you now see them."

"They may have never been in the girl's possession."

"Here are her mother's initials."

"Granted, then. But why may they not have been rifled by some one else than the murderer—by the finder, for instance?"

"By me?"

"Exactly."

"No; the robber must have been the murderer."

"Most probably; and you may have been both, for all that is known to the contrary."

The student was taken by surprise.

"I neither charge nor believe that you were—bear that in mind," said Goldheim, following up his momentary advantage. "But how easily a case might be made against you, instead of me, and with an equal chain of false premises and specious reasoning."

Nixey rose, with a contemptuous laugh.

"This poor evasion will avail you nothing," said he, coldly. "I wish you good-evening."

"Wait! what shall you do?"

"Nothing at present—perhaps nothing in the immediate future, unless the neck of the innocent man now in prison should be imperiled. In that case, beware!"

"Do you have any idea of the remaining sister's whereabouts?"

"No. Would to God I did! for then—"

The student checked his passionate utterance.

"Did you ever see her?"

"Never to my knowledge, and yet—"

Nixey again interrupted himself.

"Pshaw! She may also be dead."

"Impossible! I have her image here, here in my heart's core! She is the angel of my dreams! I shall yet find and restore her to her own! I know, I feel it!"

"This is mawkish sentiment. Good-night. Shall you continue your academic course?"

"Undoubtedly. My diploma, which will be ready for me in a few months, I cannot afford to relinquish."

"You are sensible in that." The innkeeper ceremoniously unlocked both the doors. "Good-night!"

His sudden collectedness of manner was not a little puzzling to the student.

"One thing more, sir. Why, if you please, did you send for me this evening?"

"Merely to congratulate you on your escape from the ruffians who assaulted you in the wood. My daughter told me of it."

"So. Thanks for the reminder! Have you, Mr. Goldheim, any idea why those ruffians should have shadowed me all the way from New York, for the express purpose of assaulting me?"

"Not the slightest. Have you?"

"Yes; or, at least, I had at the time."

"What was your impression?"

"That they were acting under your secret instructions. At all events, I had valuable memoranda—the results of laborious research—in my possession, whose loss might have benefited

you greatly. Besides, with your Anarchist associations, the hiring of spies and even assassins would have come easy, and you are an old adept in that line."

Mr. Goldheim was regarding him with a grand mournfulness.

"I wonder," said he, bitterly, "if there is any species of villainy that you do not think me capable of. As your friend, I pity and forgive you. Good-night Mr. Nixon."

But no sooner had the student gone, with the door secured behind him, than the iron nerve of the publican gave way.

His hands wandered to his temples, and he threw himself in his chair with a strangely muffled cry—a cry between the sob of a breaking heart and the roar of a baffled beast of prey.

His daughter, gliding from her place of concealment, stood before him, pale but resolute.

"Well, father?"

There was something inspiring in her firm, clear voice.

"My daughter! What! you saw, you heard?"

"All."

She laid her hand on his powerful shoulder.

Was the touch magnetic?

At all events, he raised his head with something like a resumption of his energy.

"Nothing more is to be done then," said he, quietly. "At least, not upon the instant. We must wait."

"For what?"

He opened a drawer, disclosing a number of deadly weapons in superb condition.

"Till the young man sleeps," was his answer.

"And then?"

"Can you ask? He must be silenced, as the girl was."

Sophie shuddered, and yet she smiled.

Strange anomaly, yet true. But the shudder was outlasted by the smile, which was a terrible one, as brilliant as it was mysterious.

"You will leave this to me," said she, selecting a jeweled poniard from among the sanguinary collection, and curiously withdrawing it from its sheath.

Her father regarded her with satisfaction and relief.

"With pleasure," said he.

She floated like a phantom to the door.

"You will make sure?" he queried.

"Yes; sure that he loves me or not."

Mr. Goldheim grew anxious.

"But this will not do," said he.

"It will, I tell you. In either event his silence will be assured."

And she laid one hand upon the door, with the bared poniard still in the other.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER.

MR. GOLDHEIM would have questioned his daughter further, but that she whispered a few reassuring words that caused him to drop away from the door with a smile.

"The deed is as good as done," he thought, returning to his chair.

The door opened and reclosed, and Sophie Goldheim was on her mission of safety or death.

But, though she flitted noiselessly, like the veriest phantom, through the long, dim passages leading to the students' quarters, there was yet another step that timed with her own, yet another agile, noiseless figure, hurrying as she hurried, lagging as she lagged, a duplicate of her every movement, like the mysterious dream-follower in that species of nightmare to which few of us are strangers.

But with this difference, that in the present waking instance the haunted was oblivious of the haunter.

The haunter was in the form of a medium-statured and graceful youth, whose motions were of liquid smoothness and serpentine stealthiness.

Sophie paused at the closed door of Bernard Nixon's room until assured, by the deep, regular breathing of the inmate, just perceptible through the panels, of his being wrapped in profound slumber.

A momentary flush of maidenly modesty mantled her face in the dimness of the passage.

Howsoever vital her errand to her father's security, and perhaps her own, she was on the threshold of a step that might fatally compromise her reputation if detected.

The sleeping apartment's threshold of the man she secretly loved to the verge of madness.

But the stakes were for life or death.

She touched a hidden spring in the wall, whose secret was known but to her father and herself.

The entire door—though secured on the inside—together with the door-post holding the latch and bolt, moved silently inward, obedient to her pressure, as if by magic.

A faint glow from the student's lamp on the table rendered the interior dimly visible.

Before entering, Sophie timidly thrust her head through the opening, and cast a frightened glance toward the bed.

To her unspeakable relief, Nixey had thrown himself upon it and fallen asleep without divesting himself of his garments, other than his coat and boots.

The young woman's hesitation vanished.

She boldly slipped into the room, deepened the unconsciousness of the sleeper by administering a few whiffs of chloroform to his nostrils, raised the lamp-light to a sufficient brightness, and was presently engaged searching the person of the young man with swift but systematic thoroughness.

But the haunter had followed the haunted into the room and was even now crouching out of sight on the opposite side of the bed, watching the first intruder's work in its minutest detail.

Sophie, however, was not altogether in unison with her father's murderous desires.

She only meant to slay in case of coming on incontestible proofs that the heart of the man she loved was irrevocably lost to her, and given to another.

That such proof might be forthcoming she thought likely from his confused emotion when speaking to her father of the missing heiress, Angela Braunfels.

True, he had declared that he had never met, or even seen, the young girl, but Sophie was not prepared to believe that.

At all events, if her suspicions were well founded, some scrap of handwriting, some treasured keepsake or other, would be found upon his person.

This proof, or its absence, she was now seeking to verify.

Should her dreaded suspicion be thus confirmed in her estimation, the dagger should remorselessly do its work.

Should it prove otherwise, what then?

She hardly knew. She might throw herself upon the beloved breast, arouse him with the confession of her stormy soul, and trust to winning his responsive love. She might steal away, enraptured in the golden thought that he might still be hers, and wait for daylight to yield herself to the task of bewitching his untrammelled heart beyond the chance of a recall; and then he would thenceforth be hers, and her father's security beyond jeopardy.

But of this, as I have said, she was but vaguely conscious.

Her whole being was at this critical moment in her search.

For awhile it was unavailing. Nixey had been careful to secrete his important memoranda elsewhere than on his person before resigning himself to slumber. The articles now produced, one after another, were trifling.

Still, under his waistcoat, next his heart, was the portrait of the once-encountered, idolized object of his dreams.

He had purchased it from an out-of-the-way photographer's show-case in New York a week previously—the treasure-trove of happy accident—and since then it had never quitted the receptacle next to his beating heart, when not under the inspection of his enraptured gaze.

Nearer and nearer flew the nimble fingers of the jealous searcher to that hoarded token, whose chance discovery by her baleful gaze might be the signal for his death-stroke!

"What is this? Ha!"

The vest was unloosed—the portrait in her hands.

Sophie's face paled to deathly white as she glared upon the pictured lineaments.

No wonder now that Bernard Nixon had manifested such an absorbing interest in the murdered girl.

Here was the pictured counterpart of that vanished loveliness, only younger, more refined, and of angelic sweetness.

The image of the missing heiress, Angela Braunfels, if there was any virtue in family resemblance! Proof positive, in Sophie Goldheim's distempered fancy that the original was the plighted sweetheart of the sleeping man before her!

Not only did it signify hopelessness to Sophie's passion, but also a division of the Jekylls millions—otherwise hers, Sophie's, alone—and perhaps a bloody accountability for the death of Martha Braunfels as well!

Casting the hated portrait from her with a harsh, sibilant exclamation ground out from between her teeth, she stood there for an instant like a beautiful fury, her eyes blazing, her lips convulsed, her bosom tempestuous in its wild unrest, her unbound raven hair streaming down her neck and shoulders like a proud thundercloud in the arched splendor of a meteor's trail.

Then her resolute hand crept to the bosom of her vestment in which she had concealed the jeweled steel.

It flashed aloft!

There was no mercy in those jealous eyes, no thought of pity in that frenzied breast.

The next instant might see the deadly weapon buried to the hilt in the sleeping student's defenseless breast.

But even at that instant the teeth of the crouching figure closed upon the fleshy part of one of the listless hands dangling over the further side of the bed, biting it to the bone.

Awakened by the pain, Nixey bounded from the couch as if tossed aloft by hidden springs.

The would-be murderess shrieked, the poniard flew from her grasp, and she had effected her escape, the opening in the wall noiselessly

closing behind her before the astonished young man could identify her, or even realize the peril he had escaped.

Then, while alternately looking at the fallen dagger, the photograph and his wounded hand, the young man to whose warning he was indebted for his life slowly put in an appearance.

Nixey was sure he had never seen this young man before.

It was a mere youth, gracefully and even elegantly proportioned; a melancholy blonde youth, with crisp-curling bright hair all over his shapely head, a delicate mustache, a girl's freshness of complexion, and honest but troubled blue-gray eyes that met the young student's fierce, challenging glance unabashed.

He was coarsely but becomingly dressed in what might be the better attire of a young hostler, or an under-groom, in a rich man's stables.

Nixey took in the stranger's belongings at a single glance.

He looked once more at his injured hand, repossessed the picture, tossed the dagger on the table, and threw himself in his easy-chair, with his back to the light.

"Explain!" said he, sternly.

He was obeyed, to the minutest detail of what had chanced.

To say that Nixey was astounded but feebly expresses his emotion at what was told him.

Then came the natural sense of mystification.

"You effected all this," said he, "you did me this service, without my intending murder even dreaming of your attendant presence—of the very instrumentality that baffled her infernal purpose?"

"Yes. I deemed it best to assist you in secret, if possible. It is my ambition to be of yet further use to you in the future. If neither Goldheim nor his daughter suspects my identity, so much the better."

Nixey was touched, and yet his mystification was increased.

"Right!" said he. "And since Miss Goldheim is doubtless sure of having effected her disappearance before I could recognize her, the ignorance of the father and daughter will remain undisturbed for the present. Now satisfy my curiosity regarding yourself."

"First let me attend to your poor hand," exclaimed the youth, starting forward. "See, it bleeds. It must pain you greatly."

Nixey motioned him back.

"It pains me, but I can bear it," said he. "A mere trifle."

He reached to the washstand, and speedily had the wounded member bandaged in a wet cloth.

"Now, go on," said he. "Who are you?"

"A poor young man, out of work for the present, Elmer Faithful by name, and a relative of Mrs. Aylmer, the housekeeper, who gave me shelter on my application for the night. My cousin Janet was apprehensive of your safety. It was at her suggestion that I lurked in the passages directly after your passing into Mr. Goldheim's parlor. The rest you know."

Nixey remained for some moments buried in thought.

Undoubtedly this was the strangest and most complicated adventure of his eventful life.

"I am under profound obligations to Miss Aylmer, no less than to you," said he at last. "She is a noble girl, and you are an excellent boy—faithful in deed as in name."

Much gratified, Elmer slightly inclined his melancholy face, and murmured his acknowledgments.

"Would you like to enter my service?" asked Nixey, after another pause.

"Would I?"

The glow on the suddenly-uplifted face was a sufficient answer.

"I am oddly situated, my young friend," Nixey went on to explain, with commendable frankness. "I am a dependent myself upon a noble gentleman, who is my benefactor, and whose generous kindness is without limit. But I have thus far only accepted a modest allowance at his hands. Do you follow me?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"My benefactor is now abroad with his family. Nevertheless, I have, during the past five years, managed to lay by fifteen hundred dollars out of my allowance. This is my entire capital at present."

Elmer rolled up his eyes.

"It is a vast sum, sir."

Nixey smiled.

"It might not go a great way in the difficult quest I am about to enter upon. I merely state my circumstances to show you how meagerly I would be able to compensate your services."

"Sir, only to be with you—to be permitted to share your hardships and your adventures—would be all I should ask."

The youth spoke with suppressed emotion.

"That would not do. I should insist upon paying you what I could afford. But you would, nevertheless, be my friend, my other self, my inseparable companion."

"Oh, sir, I hope for nothing better than this."

"Go, now," said Nixey. "See! it is almost daylight. Give my respects to Mrs. and Miss Aylmer, and say that I will call on them soon

after breakfast, in regard to your capacity and antecedents."

The youthful Elmer wore a still brighter look as he bowed himself out of the room, after calling Nixey's attention to the door with a significant gesture.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELMER FAITHFUL.

It was now a Sunday.

Elmer had no sooner disappeared than Nixey proceeded to examine the doorway of his room.

A brief inspection disclosed the mechanism by which Sophie had been enabled to effect an entrance, in spite of the fastenings, and without even disturbing the inmates.

A sense of mortification momentarily overcame the student.

"Have I been unsuspectingly at the mercy of Goldheim & Daughter all this time?" he muttered, scratching his head. "Thank the Lord! Hawk Heron cannot know of this, or I am afraid he would be sadly ashamed of his novice. However, if I am tricked in this way again, may Angela Braunfels remain undiscovered, and Sophie, the tigress beauty, step unchallenged into the enjoyment of the Jekylls millions!"

He made his toilet, and started for a long, contemplative walk in the fresh morning air.

At about nine o'clock he called on the Aylmers.

Much to his surprise, he found them packed up, in readiness for a change of quarters.

"Yes, Mr. Nixon," said Mrs. Aylmer, in response to his look of inquiry. "For some days since our misfortune I have been thinking that our proper place is in the country town where my husband is undergoing his imprisonment. Then Janet's fearful adventure on the roof last night, which she told me all about, determined me fully in making the change. I have notified Mr. Goldheim, and we take our departure for N— to-morrow morning."

"It is doubtless a consistent step on your part," said Nixey, after a little reflection. "Where is your daughter and my new acquaintance, her young cousin, Elmer Faithful?"

"Janet will see you in a moment," said Mrs. Aylmer, looking unaccountably disconcerted. "As for the boy—well, he is somewhat sensitive. You won't be likely to see the two together."

Nixey thought this very natural, inasmuch as the youth was likely to be the chief topic of discussion.

"Did Elmer tell you of our joint adventure?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Yes; it was terrible! But here is Janet at last to answer for herself."

And as her daughter entered the good dame made her escape, doubtless to busy herself elsewhere.

Janet finally, in answer to Nixey's inquiries as to her cousin's character and abilities, expressed herself as follows:

"Elmer Faithful is inexperienced, but he is brave as a lion in a good cause, dutiful where his services are rendered, clever after a fashion, and as true as steel!"

"You vouch for his discretion, Janet? That is all I want to know."

"As I would vouch for my own."

"Say no more. He is engaged forthwith. Pray send him to me."

Janet grew confused.

"He is on an errand for me," said she. "Will it not answer if he comes to your room after dinner?"

"As well as not. Now let me consult you as to bestowing him."

She grew yet more confused.

"There is a small furnished room, across the passage from mine, that is unoccupied," he went on, without heeding. "Might that be made to accommodate him?"

She seemed relieved.

"Yes," said she, eagerly. "The very thing, I think."

"That is settled then. I shall speak at once to Miss Goldheim about engaging it."

"You—you have seen her already this morning?"

Nixey smiled complacently.

"Of course, and her father, too, at breakfast."

"How did they act—she, especially?"

"As innocently as might be, while I merely spoke of having been unaccountably disturbed by either a ghost or a nightmare, I knew not which. They both seemed immensely relieved. I am on my guard, never fear."

"And Elmer will assist you to be so, I am sure of that. By the way—"

"What is it?"

"My cousin Elmer has loved my father as an own parent from his childhood up. He will naturally take redoubled interest in any researches looking to the liberation of my poor father from this foul charge against him."

She spoke with a quivering voice and brimming eyes.

"Do you think I do not understand?" said Nixey, taking her hand sympathetically. "The release and vindication of Mr. Aylmer is one of the two supreme objects of my future course. The other is—"

He reflected that Janet could not divine, as yet, the connecting mystery of Angela Braunfels's part in the investigation, nor was it essential that she should.

"No matter," he continued, briefly. "I shall be on the lookout for Elmer after dinner."

On the following day the youth, Elmer Faithful, was regularly installed as a sort of combined *protege* and body-servant of Nixey's.

There were already several of the students—scions for the most part of the *nouveaux riches*—similarly provided in the hotel, and the fact of one in Bernard Nixon's circumstances seemingly aping such an aristocratic feature may have been looked upon as odd, or even snobbish, but excited no open comment.

Elmer was found to be intelligent, respectful and indefatigable to a degree that both surprised and delighted his young master.

If his chronic silence and melancholy was somewhat puzzling besides, as being inconsistent in one so youthful and so handsome, that was considerably regarded as an affair of his own.

For the first fortnight of his employment, Elmer was sent on frequent expeditions, mostly to New York, in Nixey's secret interest, while the latter seemingly devoted himself exclusively to his books, while secretly studying the home-life of the Goldheims.

At last the summer vacation arrived, and one after another the student-boarders began to quit the hotel.

But a large number of them still remained when, on a certain Sunday morning, Elmer brought word from Landlord Goldheim praying Nixey to grant him a private interview.

As if by mutual consent, a smiling truce had existed between host and guest since the memorable midnight interview.

Miss Goldheim, hypocritically urbane, was present on this occasion with some embroidery work in her hands, when Nixey entered her father's private apartments.

"You are on easy terms with Mr. Earnst Mandel, are you not, Mr. Nixon?" asked the innkeeper looking up from his writing.

The person referred to was a Polish student, little liked, and rejoicing in the sobriquet of Ursus Major, or the Great Bear, by reason of his hairy, uncouth strength and surly manners, though of a recognized powerful mind.

"I have nothing against him, sir," was the evasive reply.

"Well, Mr. Mandel is to remain here during the vacation, and he is in love with the view from your room-window. He would like very much to become your room-mate. Have you any objections?"

"Decided ones, sir. I have never liked Mr. Mandel, and prefer his room to his company."

"Frank, at all events!" said Mr. Goldheim, smiling.

He then endeavored to remove the young man's objections to the Polish student as a bosom companion, but without success.

"Very good, then, Mr. Nixon," said the innkeeper. "It is your own affair, though I am sorry to find you so prejudiced. Good-morning!"

He turned to his daughter when the young man had gone.

"Another chance slipped!" said he sternly. "It is now in your hands, and pray remember that another failure may recoil upon us both. Moreover, time is growing precious."

"I am forgetful of nothing, father," said Sophie, putting away her work.

"Have you thoroughly sounded the boy, Elmer?"

"Yes; and can make nothing of him. Leave it to the Pole, under my inspiration. The consequences, however, may be wide-spread."

A savage gesture of impatience from the father.

"If it involve a hecatomb, what is that to us, so long as Nixey is wiped out?" he growled. "I can make no decided move toward establishing your identity with the lawyers, while he is in our path."

"He shall be—effaced."

"The boy is some relation to those Aylmers, I understand."

"Yes."

"That alone is suspicious. Include him in the effacement."

"Such has been my intention from the first. By the way, I received a note from Janet today."

"What does she want?"

"Her mother has found employment in N—, but the girl is without a place, and despondent. She would like to be my maid."

"Can you make use of her—with the main end in view?"

"I think so."

"Hire her, then."

"I shall think it over."

"Seek out Mandel now, and remember that I shall be anxious."

CHAPTER IX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It being delightful weather, when most of the boarders were wont to be out of doors, Miss Goldheim set out through the wooded grounds, accompanied by Czar.

She presently found the object of her quest, reading a book on the bank of a brook.

"A new day is breaking!" cried the Great Bear, as he was called. "I am dazzled, but overjoyed!"

And springing to his feet, he began kissing Sophie's hands with an effusiveness of gallantry more foreign than conventional.

He was a burly young giant, bearded like a satyr, and with small, piggish eyes set in a head as hard and round as a thirty-two pound cannon-ball, but somehow conveying the impression that it was as full of brains and energy as an egg is of meat.

"Do behave yourself, you great bore!" said Sophie, half-playfully repelling him. "Be quiet, for I have something to say to you."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Nothing better for me!" roared the fellow, who had a voice like a thunder-clap. "Here you are, then."

And as she seated herself rather daintily on a grassy bank, with the great dog at her side, Ernest rolled about at her feet, full-length in the weeds and grass, like a hippopotamus in its reedy wallow.

"If you don't speak lower," said Sophie, "and a good deal lower, I shall go away."

Ernest suppressed a fresh desire to bellow, and eyed her with twinkling eyes.

"My charmer, your word is law," said he, in a really low and not unmusical voice. "I love you to distraction! Sing on; I listen."

"Nixon refuses to associate himself with you."

"I thought he would, for he is no man's fool. But I would have cheerfully blown him to pieces in the first experiment to oblige your dear papa."

"He not only refused, but acknowledged point blank that he hates you."

"To be sure, since he must have divined that I hate him like blazes."

Nevertheless, Earnst leaned his chin on his hairy clinched hands, and knitted his beetle brows.

"I can't exactly account for it, though," continued the young woman, as if speaking to herself. "He could scarcely know of your caring for me."

"What!"

The Ursus Major was sitting up now, with his paws at his ears, and his beady little eyes twinkling like green gems.

"Nothing."

"Go on, little one, or I shall be infuriated! Has the gloomy-eyed young American ever made love to you?"

"Not much—that is—you know I told you of his having once made advances to me."

"True, but a mere trifle. Not again—not more unmistakably?"

"Perhaps not—that is—but, indeed, I repulsed him, Earnst! Oh, oh! you frighten me. Is it my fault if the student's passions run away with him? Besides, what are a few protestations—an attempt to kiss me—to clasp my waist? Oh, dear!"

"Say no more!"

In his rough, brutal way, the Pole's passion for his host's daughter was sincere. It was, moreover, dangerous, though perhaps not to her.

He had abruptly risen to his huge, burly height, and was stretching out his massive arms, while inflating his mighty chest with a sort of vicious energy.

His superfluous fury would doubtless have found vent in another of his favorite roars, but that a leisurely step was heard on the adjacent path, while Czar pricked up his ears with a low growl.

"Hush!" whispered the giant, warningly. "Silence that brute, or I'll break his back! Now crouch lower, and look!"

It was Nixey, who was enjoying his after-breakfast cigar along the wooded path, with the intention of visiting the mill-dam and cataract, a common haunt of his.

Unconscious of the ambushade, he passed within a few paces of it.

"Keep your eyes on him, and then on me!" hissed Earnst, between his compressed, bearded lips. "If he makes for the cataract, he is lost!"

He did make for the cataract.

Rising, with her hand on Czar's collar, her eyes following the direction of Earnst's gaze, Sophie could plainly see almost the entire surface of the dam, into which the brook debouched, as one of its lesser affluents, scarcely fifty yards distant.

It was a secluded spot, and fraught with watery dangers.

The mill at the lower end was no longer in use. The pond, overbrimmed by recent freshets, flowed toward the dam with an ever-increasing current that soon became of arrow-like rapidity, finally shooting over the ledge, interspersed with jutting rocks, in a sheer, glassy plunge of more than thirty feet.

Then, alongside the jagged wheel of the disused mill, there was a great rocky basin, a boiling caldron, appropriately denominated Dead Man's Hole, of unknown depth and superstitious terrors, out of which, it was reported, no victim, once hurled into its grisly maw, ever reappeared, alive or dead.

But the shores of the pond were shady and inviting, with a narrow and winding path encircling them at the perilous water's edge.

It was into this path, that the secret watchers presently saw Bernard Nixon idly turn wholly unsuspecting of threatening ill.

"Wait here!" said the Ursus Major, in a deep, thrilling voice. "Mind; you are to utter no warning cry, on your life!"

Loving the terrible young woman as he did, he could not know how little the injunction was needed.

As the giant disappeared among the trees to her right, her entire evil soul, and a world of animosity was in her eyes, as she kept them riveted on the back of the unconscious saunterer by the waterside, whom she had come to both love and hate in equal portions, if such an emotional condition is possible or comprehensible.

She saw the prospective victim come to a momentary rise in the path, and look out over the swift waters with folded arms.

Then there was a veiled movement in the thicket behind him—a sudden jostling rush on the part of the Pole's huge bulk—and the student was battling with the mad current.

But once he turned his astonished face toward the bank.

A single glance might have been vouchsafed him of his enemy, grinning and gesticulating in fiendish derision there, and then face and form disappeared.

As Miss Goldheim remained looking over the fatal spot, as if carved to stone, hardly knowing whether to be rejoiced or appalled, the perpetrator came running back.

He was actually making merry, romping, capering and gibbering among the green trees, like a veritable wild bear after a plundering frolic in a honey-log.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!" he roared. "My little beauty, did you mark him sprawl? Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! The gulfs have got him by the feet! Where is his famous vise-clutch now? The gloomy youth will pester you no more, my marmot, my smooth rabbit with the sloe-black eyes! Ha, ha, ha!"

Sophie, with her glance still astray, was white to the lips.

"Oof, Satyr! Will you be quiet?" she exclaimed, angrily. "Your voice is distracting! Would you advertise your murderousness?"

"Little do I care, if I have but you to myself, my dear! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

He even threw himself upon the grassy bank, snatching the great hound in his mad embrace, regardless of a dissenting growl, and rolling here and there, roaring as he rolled.

"Heathenish savage!"

But the epithet died on her lips, giving place to an astonished cry.

"Ha! he is not lost!" she gasped. "There, there, right at the brink! he has grasped a rock—his head is above the foam! The boy Elmer is running out to him from the further side! If he receives aid, he is saved!"

The giant was again erect taking in the new conditions of the scene.

"Such aid shall not be his, if I can thrust him down!" he growled, and dashed away toward the dam.

"Stay! Hold, on your peril!" screamed Sophie. "Remember, there is a witness. Czar, come back here, you!"

But her warning was lost upon both savages—man and dog—alike.

Away flew the Polander, with incredible alertness, considering his bulk, and the bloodhound was close behind.

Nixey, who had only seen Elmer picking his way from rock to rock along the ledge from the further side, was maintaining his position on the watery brink only with the utmost difficulty.

"Hasten slowly, my boy!" he called out, cool and collected in the very jaws of death. "Now do just precisely as I direct you!"

"Fear not for me, master!" came the brave response. "I will save you, or die with you!"

"Well said!"

The cataract was making momentary breaches clear over Nixey's head and shoulders—the only parts of his body not submerged—but his voice was perfectly steady:

"Be careful with your next step, the rock is slippery. There you are! Now try to shove me that stranded log. After that—"

To his surprise, the boy suddenly stopped midway in his efforts, seemingly paralyzed by some awful vision on the opposite side of the chute.

"Oh, have mercy!" was all he could wail.

"Surely—surely you would not break his hold?"

Then there was a harsh, snarling laugh, a savage bark.

Nixey strugglingly turned his head. There was Earnst, already reaching for him from his precarious foothold on the last out-cropping rock on the opposite side, and with the bloodhound beside him, its neck bristling with mingled excitement and fear.

Reaching for him, yes, but with a massive staff in his hands, and not to save, but to hurl him from his last support into the seething, whirling gulf of Dead Man's Hole, far, far below!

"Wretch!" cried Nixey; "what would you

do? Was it not enough to hurl me into the race?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No, not enough, not quite, my little man!" roared the Colossus. "Down you go! Ho, ho, ho! Where is your vise-clutch now?"

At that instant he felt it!

Reaching a little too hurriedly, he lost his stick, and then, missing his next stroke, to tear loose the student's grasp upon the saving rock, the latter's disengaged hand, springing out of the spray like the Hand of Doom, suddenly closed upon the hostile upper-arm with the terrible, the irresistible "nip," too soon derided, and too late esteemed!

Giant that he was, he howled with pain, for at the first wrench the muscle was almost torn out of his arm.

The dog, with wonderful intelligence, fastened on to one of Earnst's slowly receding legs, but it was in vain.

The next instant, the black rock failed them both, the plummy brim of the cataract seemed to leap up to gather them into its deceitful embrace, and man and dog went plunging down into the abyss.

The violent exertion incident upon this feat proved the salvation of Nixey himself.

The stranded log, as if jostled from its lodging-place by the contention of the combatants on the cataract's brow, suddenly slid to within his reach, and held fast again.

In a moment he was upon it—fortunately it remained fixed—then Elmer's trembling hand reached out to him, and he was saved.

To paraphrase a famous stanza:

Breaking the horror's spell,
Boldly he'd fought and well,
Out of the jaws of Death,
Out of the mouth of Hell,
Strode the brave Student!

"To the shore—quick!" gasped Nixey, still retaining Elmer's faithful hand, as they picked their way over the fearful stepping stone. "No time to be lost!"

It was only when safe and sound upon the high bank that he clasped the boy in a hurried and grateful embrace—the latter yielding to the caress with a sort of passionate sob, as if surcharged with a joy beyond expression.

"Quick, now, or the rascal will be drowned!" continued Nixey, dragging the boy after him.

"To the lower basin, to the Dead Man's Hole!"

"What!" said Elmer, trying to hold back; "you would save that treacherous wretch, that intending assassin?"

"Yes, but through no superhuman magnanimity, I assure you! Do you forget that he must have had a prompter, an instigator to the dastard deed, as yet to us unknown? Come, we must hasten!"

But even here, while about to descend the wooded embankment below the dam, the boy succeeded in effecting a halt.

"Look!" he hoarsely whispered, pointing to the opposite bank. "Let the instigator's presence speak for itself!"

"Sophie—Sophie Goldheim!" muttered Nixey, likewise drawing back. "And yet I might have guessed it."

It was, indeed, Sophie, who, having witnessed her admirer's misfortune, was now hurrying toward the Dead Man's Hole, though less on his account than might have been imagined.

"My dog! my poor Czar!" she was murmuring to herself while hurrying down the face of the cliff. "I shall never forgive myself if he is lost!"

Nixey and his companion watched her breathlessly.

On reaching the edge of the whirlpool, she gave a cry of relief, for Czar was seen swimming laboriously toward her, with something in his jaws.

It was the collar of a man's coat that he was clutching.

Sophie encouraged him with her voice, and even waded waist-deep into the pool to assist him with his burden.

For once at least, mauger legend and report, had the death-swirl of Dead Man's Hole yielded up its human victim.

The burden proved to be the Polander's insensible body, and between the exertions of Sophie and the dog it was landed, and dragged up on the shelving shore.

Nixey and Elmer remained on watch till the dripping giant showed some signs of returning consciousness; at last, even sitting up and looking stupidly around, while holding out his right arm helplessly, as if still paralyzed from the phenomenal nip that had so nearly proved fatal to its owner.

"Come," said Nixey, rising; "we must take counsel together. This is no longer the place for me, if I would not tempt renewed murderous assaults."

Elmer followed in silence till a secluded little opening in the wood was reached, where Nixey could dry himself at leisure in the sun.

"No," continued the student, taking a seat on the stump, after spreading out his coat, waistcoat and shoes—he had lost his hat. "I dare not risk further residence at the hotel, or even in this neighborhood. Gad! it's worse than Henry of Navarre's lot in the palace of the

queen-mother, Catharine de Medici. The Goldheims are capable of blowing up the entire caravansary for the mere sake of getting rid of me, and perhaps you in the bargain."

"But you will surely have the Great Bear arrested!" exclaimed Elmer. "You have me as a witness."

Nixey shook his head.

"It would ruin all," said he. "I must continue to work in secret till ready to strike at wholesale—root and branch."

"You are set in this, sir?"

"Yes; one contingency alone—Mr. Aylmer's likelihood of conviction—would cause me to depart from my general plan."

"But you will quit the hotel?"

"Yes; for the present I cannot think of remaining."

"It would certainly be madness to stay unresistingly after what has chanced."

"True; and moreover, in New York—in the seething heart of the great city, we shall have better opportunities."

"What shall you do now?"

Nixey remained for a moment plunged in thought.

"We must return to the hotel first, as if unaware of Miss Goldheim's participation in this last attempt on my life," said he at last.

"Come. And I rather fancy that the Great Bear will keep himself out of sight for the time being, at least."

"Yes," said Elmer, "and with a sore foreleg that will last him for a week."

As they were making their way through the wood, voices were heard in an adjacent path.

They proved to belong to Sophie and Earnst, on their way up from the pool.

Nixey and Elmer, willing to overhear what might pass between the precious pair, came to a silent pause.

But at that instant the bloodhound, scenting their proximity, came bounding, open-mouthed, toward their covert.

CHAPTER X.

FRESH DANGER.

"WE must overhear, unperceived," whispered Nixey to his companion. "Disclose yourself to the brute—tempt his spring! I'll attend to the rest."

Elmer shrunk back, trembling like a leaf; but a glance from his beloved master nerved him to obedience.

Such a glance would have won him a martyrdom, if needs were.

Pale and trembling, he stepped from the covert, the on-coming dog shooting straight for his throat with its deep, blood-curdling growl.

But Nixey had interposed with the gliding sinuosity of a serpent.

Flash! and the brute's brawny neck was encircled between the collar and the ears with the invincible double-handed grip, as with the deadly boa's middlemost constrictive coil.

As Czar's quietude was thus secured, Nixey looked up and nodded.

Then both master and boy listened with all their might.

"Who could have foreseen that grip of his on my arm?" was the first they distinguished of the approaching voices. "But for that, I would have had him dead."

It was the Polander's voice.

"It can't be helped now," said Sophie in reply. "Better success next time, though it does seem that he bears a charmed life."

"Not for me, little marmot! There are Anarchists and bombs still left in the world."

"Hush! Do not talk so, Earnst."

"Why, my rabbit?"

"Think of our poor friends in Chicago. The hangman is twisting his noose for them already. It makes me shudder!"

"But we are not in Chicago, my catbird. Trust your father and me. Dynamite is not dead yet, while secrecy survives."

Miss Goldheim's response was indistinct, and then the other voice passed beyond hearing.

Nixey suddenly released the bloodhound, with a parting kick in the ribs that sent him off like a shot, momentarily cowed.

"I can scarcely believe my ears, sir," said Elmer.

"I don't discredit mine," said Nixey.

"Is it possible that they are in sympathy with those murderous miscreants in Chicago?"

"Not only in sympathy, but in secret league. But this was no news to me."

"Oh, sir! what will become of you?"

"Leave that to me, my lad. In the mean time let us not return to the hotel till supper-time. There is a restaurant in the next village beyond Staylesbridge where we can dine and think at our leisure."

They acted on this suggestion.

Returning to the hotel in time for supper, at which the Goldheims and Earnst were conspicuous by their absence, Nixey and Elmer spent the early hours of the evening in chatting with some of the students, and then retired to their apartments, complaining of over-fatigue.

The boy eyed his young master with no little anxiety as they passed through the long upper corridor.

"Surely, sir," said he, "you will not pass another night under this accursed roof?"

"That depends," said Nixey. "In the mean time, we have preparations to make."

Pausing at his own door he touched a spring at the side, causing the entire casing to swing inward as Miss Goldheim had once done before.

"Ah!" exclaimed Elmer, "you have not yet fore-stalled even this device of the enemy?"

"All in good time," said the other, leading the way into the room, and striking a light. "But there is work before us."

The sound of sacred music rose softly through the corridors, as was the custom on Sunday evenings, when Mr. Goldheim and his daughter were wont to conduct prayers and sacred singing in the hotel parlor.

Piety is so often the cloak of master-villainy in this world!

The sounds were gradually hushed, evening ebbing into night, night into midnight, midnight into the yet darker hours that precede the dawn.

The hotel interior was apparently wrapped in slumber, when two figures, a woman's in the lead, a man's of powerful outlines following, slipped without a light along the silent corridor.

At the door of Nixey's room they paused, there was the stealthy gleam of a dark lantern, and the foremost figure entered without a sound.

What seemed the figure of the inmate lay motionless on the bed.

The intruder returned to the corridor with a significant gesture to her companion.

He seemed to be carrying something very carefully under a long cloak.

Then he slipped into the room, almost instantly reappearing with an encouraging nod.

The opening was closed as noiselessly as it had been made.

The room opposite had been assigned to the boy, Elmer.

Here the same operation, under similar conditions, was effected.

The prowling figures retraced their steps.

At the entrance to the private apartments, Mr. Goldheim, a small lamp in his hand, was anxiously awaiting their return.

"You have made sure?" he queried, in a low voice. "There will be no blundering this time?"

His daughter's only response was a deadly smile.

"Sure?" echoed her companion prowler, in the guttural whisper of the Polish student. "Our bomb-throwing brethren in Chicago were not more sure of their victims in the Chicago streets!"

"That is well."

The light was extinguished, and the three figures melted into the darkness and silence.

The hush deepened, and time ebbed on apace.

Then there were two terrific explosions, in swift succession, almost rocking the building to its foundations.

They were accompanied by fiery flashes from the students' quarters, the passages were filled with smoke, the inmates rushed or were hurled from their beds, all was confusion, horror and dismay.

"Steady!" called out Mr. Goldheim's ringing voice. "Keep cool! Extinguishers and fire-buckets to the rescue!"

Prompt obedience was given to his orders by the crowd of excited boarders and servants that had quickly gathered around him.

The appliances for extinguishing fire were excellent, and every one worked with a will, while admiring the hotel-keeper's coolness and presence of mind in the trying emergency.

As daylight began to brighten it became evident that the fire had finally been stamped out, though two rooms in the students' quarters were hopelessly wrecked and charred, while a portion of the rooms and lofts above was also more or less dismantled.

"This is terrible!" sternly commented Mr. Goldheim. "Criminal carelessness, too, somewhere! Who occupied those two rooms?"

He was the center of a great group on the lawn, as he spoke.

It was the breathing moment after the terrible half-hour of confusion, excitement and hard work.

Smoke was still rising from the wrecked quarter, and the grass was heaped with articles of furniture, trunks, boxes, etc., many of the latter belonging to the female domestics.

"Bernard Nixon and his young man, Elmer Faithful occupied the rooms," said one of the students. "They must have been killed by the shock."

"Worse than that—burned to a crisp, most likely!" cried a third. "The interior must have been blown into fragments before the fire caught on."

"Just the reason why they were beyond feeling the scorching!" cried Earnst Mandel, in his big voice. "I myself was fired out of my bed, three rooms away, as if shot out of a mortar. But come, some of you chaps! let us now investigate."

A knot of students were detaching themselves from the main group when a cry of astonishment arose.

Bernard Nixon, followed by Elmer, was seen at that moment coolly issuing from the lower story.

They carried a heavy trunk between them, which they deposited with an orderly little heap of luggage under a tree.

Elmer took his seat on the pile, while Nixey turned with a nod to the crowd that pressed excitedly about him.

At this instant Miss Goldheim's dog, looking dazed and scorched, ran out of the building, and cowered at his young mistress's side.

"We thought you dead!" chorused a dozen glad voices around Nixey. "How did you escape from your room?"

"I wasn't in it," was the collected reply, with an odd glance at the Goldheims and Earnst, now somewhat recovered from their bewilderment. "Elmer and I were more profitably engaged than waiting to be blown up."

"But explain yourself, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Goldheim, excitedly. "Whose baggage is all this?"

"Mine and my servant's, sir. This last trunk, however, we obtained from a certain compartment in the loft, faithfully guarded by Czar yonder till the explosion temporarily incapacitated him."

As Nixey spoke, he mechanically stretched his right hand, slowly opening and shutting it, after that odd habit of his.

The Goldheims at once recognized the trunk as Mattie Braun's, believed until that moment safe under bolt, bar and watch-dog's fidelity in the strongest of the loft store-rooms.

Sophie Goldheim had, also, by this time recovered from her consternation.

"That trunk!" she burst out, indignantly. "Why, it is—"

She met the cold, steely glance of the amateur detective's eye, and stopped with a choking sound.

"Mine, for the time being, at least!" supplemented Nixey, in a low voice audible only to the father and daughter. "So, say no more about it, on your peril!"

He then superficially explained to the crowd of students, villagers and the rest how Elmer and he, at the time of the explosion, had fortunately taken themselves off, with their effects, to another portion of the building, preparatory to quitting the hotel at an early hour.

"For some time I have suspected something wrong about the hotel building," said he, vaguely. "At all events, it is no place for me, and I shall not tarry another day."

The impression of insecurity, which his manner more than his words conveyed, spread like a contagion.

"Nor I! Nor I!" echoed a dozen voices, one after the other; and Mr. Goldheim did not venture to oppose a single protest to the popular sentiment.

Nixey and Elmer quitted the place, with their effects, half an hour later.

At the parting moment Mr. Goldheim's eye met Nixey's, half-quailingly, but with a Satanic glitter in its smoldering depths, as much as to say:

"You may triumph for the moment, but beware! The struggle between us is but begun."

But, for all that, all the remaining boarders had deserted the hotel in less than a week; and the place was indefinitely shut up, the keeper and his daughter ostensibly seeking repose at one of the seaside resorts.

CHAPTER XI.

NIXEY'S CLEW.

IN the afternoon following the explosion, Nixey came out of the private office of the chief of police of the county town of N—, after a long and absorbingly interesting conference with that dignitary.

Elmer was anxiously awaiting his master's return in the outer office, and the ex-student was accompanied by Captain Quirk, the chief himself, who seemed profoundly impressed with what had passed.

The latter cordially extended his hand for a parting pressure.

"All shall be secret as the grave, Mr. Nixon, till you give the word," said he. "Heaven speed you on this important quest."

Nixey unfolded a freshly-written document in his hand.

"And this gives me full power as your representative?" said he.

"It constitutes you a special detective officer, under my authority, with full discretion in your own person," was the reply. "The information you have given me is both startling and invaluable."

Nixey put the document in his pocket.

"I shall follow my clew," said he, with becoming modesty, "till the real murderer of Mattie Braun is in the inexorable clutch of Connecticut justice."

"You are an unworthy novice of Hawk Heron, the whilom Falcon Detective, if you do not keep your word," said Captain Quirk, with a smile. "And something tells me that you will do so."

"And if my discoveries should also develop a

systematized and wholly unsuspected connection with the bomb-throwing miscreants now on trial in Chicago?"

"So much the better! Bless me! why, I should say so. It would give our little county authorities here a national reputation."

"Well, I promise nothing on that score; though I am glad to have won your confidence."

"Wait."

The chief seated himself at a desk, and filled up a check for two hundred dollars, which he handed to the newly-fledged detective.

"Let that speak for itself," said he. "I give you this much toward your expenses on my own responsibility, and there's more where that came from."

Nixey's sallow face flushed with pleasure.

Rejoiced as he had been to call himself a *bona-fide* detective at last, this substantial proof of his superior's confidence at the outset of his career was more than he had expected.

"You shall find me worthy," said he.

"Your operations will, doubtless, be chiefly confined to New York?"

"There and the vicinity."

"Good-by, then."

"One thing more. Mr. Aylmer is still in prison."

"The district attorney will admit him to reasonable bail before sunset to-day. I answer for it."

Elmer had listened with a puzzled air, but his boyish face lighted up like a lamp at these last words of the chief's, and he fairly bounded after the detective as the latter quitted the office.

"Come," said Nixey. "We have still half-an-hour, in which to carry the good news to Mrs. Aylmer and her daughter."

"My aunt will be overjoyed," said the boy. "But I doubt if we shall find cousin Janet at home."

"Not at home!"

"You know I paid them a visit a few days ago, sir. Janet was then full of obtaining service away from home."

"And her father still in jail here? I shouldn't have thought it of her."

The boy bent his face.

"Janet is a strange girl," said he, in a low voice. "But I do not doubt her devotion to her father."

"Neither do I, for that matter. In fact your cousin, with a single exception," and the detective sighed, "is the sweetest and loveliest girl I ever met."

A melancholy shadow came over Elmer's face, but he made no reply.

Nixey glanced at him curiously.

He had come to love the lad, for his mingled gentleness and courage, even while not altogether understanding him.

"Can the youth be in love with his cousin?" he suddenly thought. "But no; he is too young, besides resembling Janet too closely in appearance and disposition. However, it might be well for them both."

As Elmer had fancied, only the gardener's wife was at home to receive the joyous tidings they brought her.

She was, of course, transported at the thought of her husband's release.

After her first transports had subsided, the detective inquired for Janet.

"She is not with me now," said the good dame, with some embarrassment. "Janet is anxious to obtain service elsewhere. She has even applied, by letter, for employment to Miss Goldheim."

Nixey was astonished, and he lost no time in telling of the recent happenings at Stayles-bridge.

"The hotel will scarcely be opened again," said he, in conclusion. "The Goldheims will probably go off somewhere for the summer."

"That would not matter," said Mrs. Aylmer. "Janet is bent on seeking employment with Miss Goldheim if practicable."

"But why?"

"Can't you guess, sir? I think it is because she is ambitious to aid you in some way."

The detective started and then bit his lip.

He could not deny that the young woman could secretly aid him greatly, if in a confidential position in the enemy's camp, but then—this additional proof of the girl's devotion to himself personally was painful to him, in view of his heart being already so engaged as to preclude the possibility of his responding to another's passion, howsoever unselfish and noble.

"Janet might aid me in that way," said he, with studied coldness. "But it might prove a thankless task for her."

Mrs. Aylmer made no reply, and the boy Elmer seemed even more chilled than she by the detective's manner.

Arriving in New York late in the afternoon, Nixey and his companion were fortunate enough to find the lawyers, Messrs. Crosswise and Short-cut, still at their office, which was the first place visited.

To these gentlemen Nixey now imparted enough of his case to seemingly make sure of not being forestalled in that quarter.

The presiding genius of that firm was apparently Mr. Crosswise, a solemn-looking, bald-headed man, with a cast in one eye, a long eel-

like body, and a mouth of prodigious dimensions that opened and shut like a fly-trap.

"Prove what you assert, Mr. Nixon," said he, "and produce the remaining heiress, Angela Braunfels, and everything will be plain sailing. Eh, Shortcut?"

Mr. Shortcut, who was a little broader than he was long, with a head like a fuzzy pumpkin, and a non-committal smile resembling a victim's in the medieval thumbscrew's caress, nodded briskly, and fixed his eyes on our hero with a sort of double-distilled corkscrew squint that seemed to turn him inside out.

"A difficult case!" he chirped out, oracularly. "A very difficult and complicated case!"

"I engage to perform my part in clearing it up, gentlemen," said Nixey, "if you, on your part, only engage to keep Arnold Wolfgang, alias Sylvanus Goldheim, at arm's-length till I shall have produced the missing heiress."

The lawyers exchanged a swift look of intelligence, which Nixey didn't exactly like, though he pretended not to heed it.

"Oh, you can rely upon that being done!" said Mr. Crosswise.

"Undoubtedly," echoed Mr. Shortcut. "We are old professionals; we are!"

And the interview was at an end.

"I hope these fellows are not capable of selling me out," said Nixey, half to himself, when moving slowly along crowded Broadway with his companion. "But if Goldheim could afford to bid high enough for their favor, I wouldn't like to burst them."

"Where now, sir?" presently inquired Elmer, who had before this been fully taken into the detective's confidence.

"To Sweeny's Hotel, whither our baggage has already been sent," was the reply. "We can remain there quietly for a few days till we obtain some notion of the enemy's movements, and in the meantime try and get a clew to Angela's whereabouts."

"Janet promised to correspond with me," said the boy, after a pause, "and, if you have no objection, sir, I shall send her my address through my aunt."

"Objection—no! But what has that to do with the case?"

"If Janet succeeds in taking service with Miss Goldheim, sir—"

"True, true!" interrupted the other. "I understand. Yes; you may aid me materially in that way."

They had small adjoining rooms in the hotel, and, soon after supper, occupied themselves with looking through the contents of poor Mattie Braun's trunk.

Nothing was forthcoming out of the ordinary line of a poor servant girl's belongings, till a shallow false-bottom was at last detected in the trunk, which was one of the ancient hair-covered sort.

"This secret receptacle has evidently not been opened for years," said Nixey, feeling for the concealed spring. "Sophie Goldheim was fortunately, not sharp enough in her investigations here, or we should doubtless have our trouble for our pains. Ah, here we are!"

The lid of the false bottom was removed, disclosing as its sole contents a flat, beautifully carved ebony box, or casket, with silver clasps, dimmed with age.

The detective took the casket in his hands, blowing off the dust, and handling it reverently, Elmer in the mean time looking on with devouring curiosity.

"I almost hate to open it," said Nixey. "It seems to me possible that the unfortunate last owner of the trunk was ignorant of that false bottom's existence, and consequently of this old casket in its depths."

"Still, sir," said Elmer, timidly, "does not the cause in which you are engaged justify you in stopping at nothing now?"

Thus urged, the detective opened the casket with but little difficulty.

It proved to contain a number of old letters and other small articles, in whose examination he was at once absorbed.

"Eureka! I have found it!" he at last exclaimed, with an excitement that was most unusual for him. "My last lingering doubt is dispelled! The angel of my dreams is identical with Mattie's younger sister, Angela Braunfels, the missing heiress—the rightful and sole heiress to the Jekylls millions!"

Elmer was more excited than he, though pale and trembling.

"Is it possible?" he murmured.

Nixey went on eagerly to explain.

As he had suspected, the poor girl Mattie had been unaware of her possession of the casket and its precious contents. What were these? Old letters that had passed between Mary Jekylls Braunfels and her first husband for a year or more preceding the latter's death. They even alluded to birthmarks on the two children, by which they might be identified at any future time, and made it evident that a description of those marks was also known to their grandfather, Jeremiah Jekylls, and, inferentially, would now be known to the deceased's solicitors, in case of the question of identity ever being contested.

The probability was that the trunk itself

(which was of English manufacture) had once been the property of the children's unhappy mother, passing after her death into the possession of the elder, who had thus been permitted to retain it in the time of her cruel separation from her sister, and at her subsequent abandonment.

But, better than all, here were three pictures. Two of them were old-time daguerreotypes of the father and mother, taken in London. The other was a photograph of the two children, taken together, and bearing an American trade-mark.

Nixey handed the last picture to his companion.

That the elder of the children was an earlier likeness of the murdered girl, Mattie, was instantly evident to any one who had known her in life.

That the younger was likewise the child's representation of the one object of his dreams was equally evident to the detective, at least.

"Here," said he, thrusting his hand into his bosom, "here is also her picture that you know of, Elmer—the sight of which a most cost me my life at Sophie Goldheim's hands."

He produced it, passing it over to the boy's inspection as if it were the Great Regent Diamond, which an envious breath might rob him of forever.

"Compare the two!" he exclaimed. "Are they not both counterfeit presentments, as Shakespeare has it, of the same divine being?"

"Yes," said Elmer, in a scarcely audible voice.

The last picture was of a singularly lovely young lady of sixteen or seventeen summers.

Also apparently of a station in life greatly superior to that of poor Mattie, the elder sister. Elmer had to acknowledge all that the detective so eagerly claimed.

But he had been growing deathly pale, and now suddenly fell back in a faint.

With an astonished exclamation, Nixey caught him in his arms.

"Are you ill?" he cried. "My poor boy, what is it? I love you as an own brother!"

"Air—a little more air!" faintly demanded the boy; and then he speedily recovered as Nixey opened both door and window, placing him in the cool draught. "There; it is over now. It must have been the closeness of the evening—a passing weakness, that is all."

Nixey regarded with a puzzled look the boyish, delicately-graceful figure.

"Brave as you are, Elmer," said he, "I fear you will find my service beyond your strength."

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Elmer, clasping his hands. "I shall be true as steel, faithful to the death!"

"Well, don't be alarmed," said Nixey, with his pleasantest smile. "You shall never leave me, save of your own accord. To-morrow, we make the round of the photograph galleries as a starter. A clew of some sort to the whereabouts of Angela Braunfels must and shall be found!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DREAM-GIRL REAPPEARS.

BUT the most diligent search among the photograph galleries, though pursued for many days, was without result.

The photographer from whom Nixey had bought the young girl's picture remembered little or nothing of the original.

The picture had been taken about a year previously, which was a little before Nixey's single chance glimpse of her in the crowded street.

The artist was, of course, impressed with the girl's extraordinary beauty, and he had a vague remembrance of her being accompanied by a little old lady, who might have been her grandmother or guardian.

But that was all.

Then every other gallery in New York was inspected in detail, without a companion picture being found.

Nixey was almost in despair.

But toward the end of the fruitless search, as an offset to this discouragement, Elmer brought word of the whereabouts of the Goldheims.

"I have heard from Janet," said he, "and she has received a letter from Miss Goldheim, in reply to her request for employment."

"Where are the Goldheims now?" inquired Nixey.

"They have hired a cottage for the rest of the season near Rye Beach, on the Sound."

"Ah, but a short distance from the city. Well, has your cousin gone to live with them?"

"Janet is not clear on that point, sir. But I infer that she is getting ready to do so."

This conversation was on Broadway, near the Post-office.

"If she goes there," said Nixey, abstractedly, "perhaps she will keep you informed of their doings."

"I know she will, sir; and in that way I can keep you informed."

"That will be well. But let's get out of this crowd. What's going on, anyway?"

A military parade was passing, and Nixey and his companion retreated to one of the Post-office entrances, whence they could partly look over the people's heads.

Suddenly Nixey grew pale.

His caring clasp of his companion's shoulder unconsciously tightened till the boy almost yelled with pain.

The detective's other hand was pointing to the opposite side of the street.

"Our quest is rewarded!" he gasped, in a low, thrilling whisper. "'Tis she—'tis Angela!"

Elmer saw her almost at the same instant.

A carriage was drawn up hard against the Astor House curbstone, by reason of the passing procession.

From this, the young girl was stepping across the crowded sidewalk, under the escort of two gentlemen, one of them of immensely powerful physique, but whose faces could not be seen.

For but an instant was the young girl's countenance turned curiously toward the pageant.

But that was enough to thrill the detective's frame with an impetuous joy, and to make evident to Elmer's devouring gaze the truth that her actual loveliness was beyond all pictured semblance and all anticipation.

She turned, and proceeded slowly with her companions toward the hotel entrance.

"Follow me!" whispered the detective, starting out of his trance.

Then he was off like a bolt, the boy at his heels.

But it is one thing to start through a dense, sight-seeing crowd, under whatsoever incumbrance, and another thing to get through it without impediment.

With curses behind and confusion before, Nixey and Elmer were brought to with a round turn somewhere in the middle of the street.

The soldiers were indignant, the street boys yelled, the blue-coated guardians waved their clubs threateningly, and our impetuous friends were unceremoniously hustled this way and that.

Nixey burst into a laugh, and was showering good-natured apologies right and left with considerable effect, but with his gaze never once quitting the group of three, now half-way up the hotel steps.

At this juncture, however, the face of one of the men escorting the girl—the larger and more massive of the two—became momentarily visible.

The sight of it was maddening, almost appalling.

It was the face of Earnst Mandel, the Polish student, the murderous Great Bear!

Simultaneously, the other man stood revealed as Mr. Goldheim.

Temporizing no longer, but almost gnashing his teeth, Nixey grasped his companion with that tremendous grip of his, and bounded forward like the yellow-and-striped monarch of the jungle through the last cordon of the hunter's toils.

How he accomplished it without a broken head or other mishap, he never exactly knew.

But the next moment he was on the sidewalk, regardless of the uncomplimentary epithets showered from every side.

The girl and her companions, however, had by this time disappeared.

"Quick—to the side-entrance!" exclaimed the detective. "Meet me in the rotunda!"

His order was carried out with the utmost alacrity.

Nixey went through the hotel office and corridors like a streak, Elmer being equally thorough and expeditious in and around the restaurant in the rotunda.

But when they met among the throngs in the latter place, it was with disappointment in the face of each.

"Wait!" muttered the detective. "I hate public inquiry, but there is no other recourse."

Hurrying back to the office, he made the necessary inquiry of the clerk with as much calmness as he could command.

"Ah! a very beautiful girl, accompanied by two gentlemen, one of them a sort of hairy giant, eh?"

"Yes."

"They were here only a minute and then went away."

"Where—in what direction?"

"How should I know? Back to the street, I think, but they didn't remain here. Room at the register, sir, if you please!"

Followed by Elmer, who at this moment rejoined him, the detective hurried midway down the inner entrance-steps, whence he could see the coach out of which the young girl had stepped a few minutes before—in his excited imagination, like a young goddess out of her cloud.

It was a handsome open barouche, evidently a private conveyance, with a mysterious-looking man on the box in dark-green livery.

But it was just being driven away with the fair girl and her companions once more in the seats.

"Don't lose sight of the carriage!" barked the detective in the boy's ear, as they darted toward the outer door like matched hounds out of leash.

"Never mind what becomes of me."

On the outer steps they were instantly separated by the excited crowd, now making a last rush after the tail end of the procession, through which, however, the coach was rapidly forcing.

its way, heedless of shouts, curses and consequences.

But, as luck would have it, a pickpocket was at this instant arrested under Nixey's very nose, entailing a second jam—a crowd within a crowd, so to speak—between his position on the hotel steps and the curbstone, which was impenetrable for the moment.

When the longed-for opening occurred, the coach had disappeared up the noisy thoroughfare, but not before a light figure, which might have been Elmer's, was seen to have caught on behind it.

Nixey was about rushing in pursuit when a low, mocking voice at his ear checked him.

"Dolt! idiot!" it whispered; "your missing heiress, your dream-imagined Angela is found again, but to be lost to you forever! She is in a trap that was well set—a clutch that knows no mercy this side of the grave!"

Swiftly as the astounded Nixey wheeled in his tracks, the source of the voice was a matter of mere conjecture.

The only one who might have spoken the words was a stylishly dressed young woman, with a blue veil over her face, who stood unconcernedly near his elbow, her attention apparently wholly absorbed by the great human tide of the mighty thoroughfare.

However, as he stood momentarily irresolute, she turned full upon him, lifting the hem of her veil with a mocking, a familiar laugh.

"Miss Goldheim! Sophie!"

But he could no more than stammer out the name before she was gone, mingling away with the up current of the pulsing throng, like an insignificant bubble on an outflowing crest of sea.

"Where the she-snake glides, its mate is not far off!" muttered the detective, slipping here and there in pursuit, the crowd glancing off from either side of his steadfast progress like foam-bells from off a strong swimmer's shoulder in the running waves. "You at least shall not escape me!"

But no, again!

He had almost reached the fugitive at the Barclay street corner when he met a sudden rock in the shape of Earnst Mandel's ponderous form, abruptly heaving up before him like a whale's back at mid-sea, and sending him back with a shock.

With this diversion in her favor Sophie, sending back a parting laugh of mockery, darted across the front platform of one of the street cars having their terminus at this spot, and was seen no more.

"Rascall clod-hopper!" roared the Ursus Major, showing his teeth, "look out where you are blundering."

He struck out with one of his sledge-hammer fists, but it was skillfully evaded.

Nixey was now half beside himself with rage and disappointment.

"Treacherous, bomb-planting hound!" he muttered, in a white rage. "This subterfuge shall not avail you!"

Then, as the giant made a fresh rush, one arm was suddenly rendered powerless in the bone-and-muscle-crushing Nixey nip, while the detective's disengaged clinched hand began such a tattoo on the other's mighty chest as made it resound like a base-drum at review, or like a disused iron boiler pounded by a paving-stone rammer during a hoodlum's holiday.

"Robbery!" yelled the Great Bear, growing red in the face. "Thieves! pickpockets!"

Now, the pickpocket sensation was still in the air, and this fresh charge, bellowed out to the full capacity of the giant's lungs, though somewhat jerkily under the tremendous rib-roasting he was receiving, was not without its effect.

In an instant Nixey was collared by one policeman and threatened by another, while he and his antagonist were made the nucleus of such a pushing, jostling, cursing, laughing, happy-go-lucky crowd as no place in the world can beat New York in producing bang-up, ready-made-to-order, dyed-in-the-grain, and on short notice.

"It's all a mistake—a subterfuge on that hound's part, to save himself!" explained Nixey. "He is a bomb-planter, a villain of the deepest dye, while I am a regularly credentialed detective officer, and I can prove what I say!"

But it was no use.

"A detective, indeed!" roared Earnst, rubbing his ribs and his arm alternately. "A prince of pickpockets, rather, with a spice of the professional slagger thrown in!"

"Come along, both on you!" growled the policeman, making the arrest. "Jack, fetch along the big 'un to make the charge afore the sergeant."

So Nixey, much to his chagrin, was bundled off to the City Hall station-house, the usual rabble of loafers and small boys trailing out behind like a comet's tail.

But "the big 'un," bulky as he was, had unaccountably disappeared when the sergeant's desk was reached, and consequently there was no charge on which to hold the prisoner.

"Send him down anyway!" advised the officer making the arrest. "This chappartended to be a detective officer."

Nixey coolly took the N— chief of police's

written authorization from his pocket, and handed it to the sergeant.

"This is all ship-shape," said the official, glancing over the document and then handing it back. "Sorry the mistake occurred, Mr. Nixon."

Then, as Nixey was turning away, the sergeant bent his eyes searchingly upon him.

"I seldom forget a face," said he. "As a boy, were you not connected with Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective, in a celebrated man-hunt of five or six years ago?"

"Yes, sir; then, as now, I was best known by my sobriquet, Nixey."

"Ah, I remember. Why don't you go up to the Mulberry street Headquarters, and obtain recognition there? It might help you along. Good-day and good luck, Nixey."

Not more than twenty minutes had been lost, so Nixey was soon on Broadway again, hurrying northward, the direction in which the open barouche had driven.

Desperate as was his chance, something whispered to him to keep straight on, and he presently boarded the front platform of a Broadway car in pursuance of that impression.

Nor was his premonition altogether deceptive. Just above Madison Square, a youth, with his face bleeding, came rushing down the street, with a rough, foreign-looking crowd of men in full chase.

Nixey required but a single glance at the fugitive to recognize him.

It was the boy Elmer!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ABDUCTION.

To spring from the car, and throw himself between the boy and his pursuers, was the work of but an instant on the part of our young hero.

But at this juncture an extraordinary thing happened.

A voice, that it was difficult to locate, suddenly shouted a few words of command in a foreign tongue.

Instantly the men in chase came to a hesitating pause, and a moment later they had mingled with the ordinary street throngs, and disappeared as if by magic.

"What does it all mean?" exclaimed Nixey, half-bewildered.

He had dragged the boy into a convenient barber shop, where the latter's injury, upon the blood being washed from his face, proved to be very trifling.

"I—I hardly know," was the panting reply. "I—I suppose I was more frightened than hurt. But those terrible foreigners!"

"What of them?"

"They all had knives and swords to have my life!"

"Tell me all about it."

"You saw me jump on behind the barouche?"

"Yes."

"Well, soon after starting, the big man, the Great Bear, jumped out and ran back."

"I know that to my cost. Go on."

"We proceeded slowly for a block or two, and then stopped for some one else. Who do you imagine slipped into the Great Bear's place, alongside the beautiful young lady?"

"Sophie Goldheim. Go on."

"Ah, then, you saw us?"

"No, no; I had seen her before that. Get on with your story."

"Yes, sir. After that we drove straight up Broadway, and then Fifth avenue, at a reckless speed. Mr. Goldheim must have first caught a glimpse of me hanging on behind at Madison Square. I am sure of it now, though I wasn't at the time, for he gave no sign of suspecting my presence there."

"What was the young lady's manner with the Goldheims?"

"Oh, very smiling and agreeable!"

"Not as if she was a captive?"

"No, no; but as if she mistook them for agreeable new friends. They seemed to have already won her confidence."

Nixey gave an inward groan.

"Go on," said he.

"Turning into Forty-second street, toward the Grand Central Depot, we passed a spot where they were mending the street, or perhaps the water-mains. A large number of men were at work. Among them was a knot of wild-eyed, savage-looking foreigners, who clustered by themselves, and from whom the other workmen seemed to keep aloof."

"Aha!" thought Nixey. "Doubtless Anarchist scum, whom the honest workmen despise as they deserve!"

"At this point we necessarily proceeded more slowly. Suddenly Mr. Goldheim, half-rising, wheeled toward me, striking at me with his cane. I tumbled from my perch, after receiving this slight cut on my scalp, which brought the blood."

"Ah!"

"At the same time he called several of the foreigners by name, and then cried out, in a low but distinct tone: 'There is a police spotter! He is doubtless here for—you fellows can guess what!' Then as the carriage was whipped out of sight, the foreigners to whom he had spoken rushed toward me in a body, swearing in half a

dozen dialects, and grasping the jack-knives in their belts. Then—then—"

Elmer paused abruptly, and hung his head.

"Then you naturally lost your presence of mind," supplemented Nixey, "and before you could find it again, you were taking to your heels, with those murderous miscreants after you?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is nothing to be ashamed of, with the odds that were against you. Come along! They've a good hour the start of us, but we have still a chance, though a slim one."

Nixey paid the barber for his accommodation, and led the way to the street.

A Hansom cab was hailed.

"The Grand Central!" sung out Nixey, as he and Elmer boarded it. "Double fare, if you make it inside of ten minutes!"

The Hansom fairly flew—*brulant le chemin*, as the French have it.

Luck of lucks!

As they drew in sight of the Grand Central, there was Earnst Mandel hurriedly alighting from a herdic, doubtless hasting to join the Goldheims, perhaps tarrying for him in the waiting-room.

He had disappeared when Nixey and Elmer sprung to the sidewalk, but they were on a hot trail.

A coin was tossed to the cabman, and the pair were in the waiting-room with a hop, skip and a jump.

Luck of lucks again, and this time of the blacker variety.

The Goldheim party, with the young heiress at the fore and the Great Bear bringing up the rear, were just disappearing into the track entrance, and then the gong boomed its indication that time was up for that particular train, and the great door was shut and locked with a hollow bang.

Two seconds are an appreciable time-quantity in railroad regulations, and our mystery-solvers were just that much too late.

Nixey paused at the gate with a sort of glare, and was then himself again.

"When is the next train for Rye?" he inquired of the gateman.

"Half-past seven. There's the indicator," was the gruff response.

Half-past seven, and it was now but six.

"There is no help for it," said Nixey, with a sigh. "Come, Elmer, we can return to our hotel, and make ready for the journey now, with time to spare."

At this moment, however, a queer little old lady, followed by a female servant, came running into the waiting-room in a considerable state of excitement.

"My granddaughter!" she exclaimed, addressing the gateman in particular and the world at large in general. "Where is she? Who has seen her? She is the loveliest and sweetest young girl in the whole world! That describes her!"

Vague description enough for every one who heard it, with a single exception, and there was a general smile, more or less disguised, at the old lady's expense.

The single exception was Bernard Nixon, for whom there was but one young girl "the loveliest and sweetest in the whole world."

At all events, he risked a demand for particulars.

"I might be able to assist you, ma'am," said he, respectfully. "Who was your granddaughter with when last seen? Have you any idea?"

His manner with elderly women was always exceptionally winning, perhaps from the pathetic fact of his having never known a mother.

This old lady responded to his sympathy as readily as a musical note to a smitten chord.

"Bless your kindness, young man, yes!" she replied, her bright little old eyes twinkling at him through her gold-bowed spectacles. "Norah here caught a last glimpse of Angela away down town near the battery, as she was being coaxed into an open barouche by two gentlemen and a fine young woman. That was the last of her, though Norah overheard something said to the coachman about the Grand Central Depot just as they drove away. Then Norah, scared to death, came bouncing home with the news on the elevated, instead of notifying a policeman. And here I am. Oh, dear! I'm that distracted I could roll on one of those benches, and go off into hysterics."

But she was the reverse of hysterical—in fact, quite wide-awake and energetic—just now, though overheated and much distressed.

Followed by Elmer, and with a sudden hope at his heart, Nixey drew the old lady and her servant somewhat apart.

"Describe," said he to the latter, "the open barouche and its inmates, with whom you saw the young lady go away."

"Oh, dear! I couldn't ever do it," said Norah, if anything more distressed than her mistress, and she wrung her hands. "I was that scared you could hev knocked me flat wid a wooden spoon!"

"But only try."

"I niver can, sor! It was only a purty open

barouche, wid a solemn-lookin' driver in green livery."

"Excellent! Now for the two gentlemen. What were they like?"

"Sure I niver can recall but one of thim, an' only that by the murtherin' size of him. He was as big as a house an' as hairy as a Derry bull-calf."

Nixey could scarcely contain his satisfaction. "You have spoken of the young lady as Angela, ma'am," said he, turning to the old lady. "May I inquire if she is really your granddaughter?"

The old lady looked confused, and then grew suspicious.

"It suits me to call the young lady my granddaughter, sir," said she, with unexpected dignity.

"My dear madam!" exclaimed the detective; "you can look on me as a friend, and consider the young lady as located."

"Pray, explain your meaning, sir."

"With alacrity! The young lady has just taken the six o'clock train on the New Haven road with the men and young woman your servant has described, and her primary destination, at least, is doubtless Rye Station. In fact, I arrived here on purpose to receive her, but was just two seconds late."

The old lady stared, and then, pressing her hand to her breast, feebly tottered to a seat.

"It's the heart trouble!" wailed the servant, instantly all dutifulness. "But be quiet, an' she may get over the shpasm."

But the old lady roused herself, and beckoned to the detective.

"It is but a passing attack, sir," she murmured faintly, as he bent eagerly over her. "But do not leave me."

"Be not alarmed, ma'am," said he gently.

"I shall have to return to my house now, or a worse attack may seize me. But pray do not leave me, sir. Something tells me we may be of use to each other in Angela's interest. My carriage is at the door. Do see me home, sir!"

With the old lady's appealing gaze upon him, the detective paused, irresolute.

Great as was the temptation to learn of Angela's history and circumstances, the idea of her remaining even an unnecessary hour in the hands of the Goldheims—doubtless fully aware of her identity, and consequently desirous of her death—was as poignant torture to his soul.

The difficulty was unexpectedly relieved by Elmer.

"Sir," said he, taking the detective slightly apart, "let me suggest a suddenly conceived plan, which I cannot help thinking a good one."

"Quick, then! what is it?"

"Let me hurry back to the hotel for a few preparations, and then proceed to Rye alone, while you accompany this good lady to her home and obtain the details of what you must be so anxious to know."

"You?"

"I swear to you that no harm shall befall the young lady. My cousin, Janet Aymer is most likely by this time in Miss Goldheim's employ, and I know that she has your interest at heart equally with myself. I shall have no trouble in communicating with her at once. I shall telegraph progress in the cipher you have instructed me in. Can you not trust me in this?"

Nixey underwent another inward struggle, and then the boy's earnestness overcame his hesitation.

"Yes," said he, pressing Elmer's hand; and they separated on this understanding without another moment's delay.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANGELA'S HISTORY.

THE old lady proved to be a Mrs. Traitner, well-to-do, and living alone with her servants in an unpretentious brown-stone house not far from Central Park.

She was a widow, and childless.

Later in the evening of that same day, which had been so eventful, she was seated with Nixey in her pretty drawing-room.

She had in a measure recovered from her indisposition, and both were prepared for the interchange of explanations which the presence of the servant at supper had then rendered inappropriate.

"Now, Mr. Nixon," said Mrs. Traitner, cosily settling herself in her favorite rocking-chair, with the young detective as her *vis-a-vis*, "suppose you tell me all you know about my granddaughter, Gelia Traitner."

"But," said the other, with a smile, "you have led me to infer that she is not your granddaughter."

"True; and that is a hint, I suppose, that I should be the first to unburden myself."

"It looks like it, Mrs. Traitner."

"Gelia is not my granddaughter, nor any other blood relation to me," the old lady at once proceeded, in a regular narrational form. "I only wish it were otherwise, though I have tried to get even with fate by bringing up the child in the impression that she really is my granddaughter by always treating her in that indulgent, loving way that is proverbial of grandmothers."

Nixey bowed.

"To be thoroughly understood," proceeded Mrs. Traitner, "I shall have to refer briefly to my own history."

"Which cannot but prove highly interesting," said Nixey, politely, though longing to get at the heart of the subject.

"Thank you, young man; you are very considerate. I married late in life, and only once knew the ineffable blessing of motherhood, and that only after my beloved husband's death, twenty-two years ago. It was a little boy, and beautiful as an angel. I am naturally affectionate, so you can judge how my heart was wrapped up in my little Amos, as the child was named after its father. It was born but a few months after his untimely death, and was the sole living pledge of a wedding bliss that had lasted less than five years. 'Wrapped up' is no name for the way I worshiped the boy. I simply idolized him, young man. And at three years of age he was lost to me forever."

She spoke with emotion.

"Ah, he died, and so early?"

"No, young man; it might have been better for him if he had. He was stolen!"

"Stolen?"

"Yes; right here in this Christian city of New York, nearly nineteen years ago. Search, advertising, detectives, offered rewards have alike been in vain. To this day, I have never heard of him, and perhaps I never shall."

Nixey maintained a sympathetic silence while the old lady was recovering herself.

"Some years later," she went on, "I was in St. Louis. One day I found a beautiful little girl, three years old, abandoned in the streets. She could only recollect her first name, together with the vague fact that she had had an older sister called Mattie, from whom she had recently been separated, and that she had been given away by her step-father to a miserably worthless couple, who had in turn abandoned her to the mercy of the street. I adopted her, and she has been the joy of my bereaved, desolated heart ever since. That child is now known as my granddaughter, Angela Traitner, and that is all her early history I know anything about."

"Her elder sister is dead," cried the detective, "but your *protegee* is of excellent parentage, besides being the sole heiress to a princely English estate!"

The old lady stared.

"But first tell me," continued the detective, "how she happened to be carried off to-day."

"That is easily explained. Angela, though now seventeen, is as credulous as she is lovely. The day was hot, and she asked me to let her go to the Battery Park with Norah to see a parade. I consented, but, after my custom, enjoined Norah not to lose sight of her for an instant. Gelia is that simple and innocent that she would believe almost any thing told her by specious, kindly-appearing strangers. You know, or can imagine, the rest. Norah's back was unfortunately turned, and her charge was spirited away."

"Have you no idea as to the identity of her kidnappers?"

"None whatever."

"But think again. Have you had no suspicion that the movements of the girl were being watched previous to this abduction?"

"No. Yet stay! Yesterday Norah mentioned a strange young lady who frequently passed the house, and on one occasion looked hard at Gelia, who was arranging those flowers in the bay window at the time."

"What was the strange young lady like?"

"Norah described her as very dark and very handsome."

And Mrs. Traitner's fuller description, from hearsay, answered pretty accurately for Sophie Goldheim.

"My worst fears are realized!" exclaimed the detective. "The conspirators first identified and located their victim, and they now have her in their power, with a full knowledge of her personality!"

"For heaven's sake! explain, sir," said Mrs. Traitner.

Without further delay, Nixey now related all he had to tell.

The astonishment of his listener is left to the reader's imagination.

"Oh, they will kill her, then!" she cried.

"As Mattie Braunfels, the elder sister, was sacrificed to their cupidity, so will Angela have been doomed! She may be murdered already!"

"No fear of that. The Goldheims are as deep and cautious as they are murderous and remorseless. They will take no action that can jeopardize their own security."

"You mean that they will go to work gradually?"

"Yes."

"What! with the knowledge of the hue and cry that I am about to raise over my darling's abduction?"

"You will not do that, I hope."

"You advise against it?"

"Strongly. My assistant is ere this on hand to protect and watch over her. I have also told you about the young woman Janet Aymer, in whom the captive will find a secret friend."

Moreover, I shall doubtless be there to-morrow. I am, in fact, expecting a telegram at my hotel, with some particulars, to-night."

"And what shall I do?"

"Remain here quietly, without making any demonstration whatever."

"With Gelia in those wretches' power?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I don't think I could do that!"

"You can't trust in me, I suppose. Well, to be sure, I am only a poor student-detective, whom you can know very little about of your own knowledge."

Mrs. Traitner remained looking at him in silence for some moments.

"You have told me almost nothing of your own history, sir," she at last said, with much gentleness.

"I am without a history fit for gentle ears," said the detective, bitterly.

"Does it include so much misfortune?"

"It includes an early blank. Father or mother I never knew. It includes a homeless street boy's career fighting its way amid pitfalls and difficulties scarcely in the understanding of happier lives. It includes tardy kindness at last, at the hands of a noble benefactor, by which I am in my present still struggling but wholly honorable position on the threshold of man's estate. For I am little more than of age, though doubtless looking so much older. That is all."

The old lady's bright eyes were swimming with tears behind her old-fashioned spectacles.

It was easy to see that his brief history had touched a sympathetic chord.

"I do trust you—implicitly!"

And she gave him her hand.

"This is excellent!" said the detective, with a sudden joyfulness in his tone. "You will then be guided solely by me, leaving the restoration of Angela entirely in my hands?"

"Yes. An inner voice of my nature assures me that my confidence in you is well placed."

Nixey raised the old lady's hand to his lips.

"Angela's guardian shall never repent of that confidence in me!" said he, with impressive solemnity. "By—by one thing that I hold dearer, more sacred, more consecrated than life itself, I swear it!"

Mrs. Traitner had been sufficiently romantic in her early days to relish the situation.

"Of course, I believe you, Bernard," said she, smiling. "But still you must tell me by what you swear so solemnly. An oath, thus vaguely registered, is—somewhat tantalizing to say the least."

Her feminine curiosity was charming, but the detective did not smile.

"First," said he, with ill-concealed anxiety, "let me beg of you the answer to a very delicate question."

"Yes, my son."

"To the best of your knowledge, my dear madam, has Angela's maiden heart ever been touched? I mean, has she ever thought of any young man in a tender sense?"

Mrs. Traitner also grew grave.

"I think not," said she. "In fact, I am certain of it, and yet—"

She hesitated, a troubled look coming into her benevolent face.

"Oh, madam! I at least am not prompted by idle curiosity or impertinence in this," said the young man, earnestly. "I beseech you to withhold nothing from me!"

"Well, then, I shall not. It was the apparent foolishness of the truth that caused me to hesitate. Know then, my son, that Angela is in love—with an image!"

"With an image?"

"Or a memory, an eidolon, an image of the mind, a mental photograph instantaneously taken, a face in the crowd, seen but once, but evermore framed in her impressionable soul! Call it what you will, that is all the substantiality of her love."

"A face in the crowd!" repeated Nixey, in a dazed way. "Explain, I beseech!"

Nearly a year before, Angela had encountered a young man on Broadway, a perfect stranger to her. But their eyes had met in the eloquent, magnet interchange that occurs in some natures perhaps only once in a lifetime, but is significant, fragrant, sacred, exceptional forevermore with love's mysterious burden, the mystic interchange of soul with soul.

The face was gone, the glance vanished almost as soon as read. Neither might ever return. But that one fateful image was delineated forevermore, in sympathetic life-likeness on the maiden's beating heart.

It was a spiritual infatuation, vague, romantic, perhaps foolishly sentimental, but profound.

Such was Mrs. Traitner's story of Angela's spirit-love.

The emotions of our young detective on learning of it may be readily imagined.

But scarcely his excess of emotion upon discovering, through such particularization of time, place and circumstances as his informant was enabled to give, that *his* was in all probability the love-haunted, love-photographed image framed in that peerless maiden-heart!

That could only be felt to be appreciated.

The young man's face was radiant, his whole form transfigured.

"Oh, madam!" he exclaimed; "now I will disclose to you that precious, that sacred mystery, on which I pledged my honor and fidelity in this dangerous cause."

Mrs. Traitner looked suspenseful.

"It is my love for your adopted child, my pure, long-treasured idolization of Angela Braunfels!"

She only stared.

"Yes," he continued, misinterpreting or not heeding her strange look, "mine must have been the face impressed upon her heart, as hers was graven upon mine in that swift but fateful meeting. Look, here is her picture, subsequently obtained by the merest accident of a photographer, and which has ever since nestled nearest my heart! Here also is her sweet picture as a child!"

He threw into Mrs. Traitner's lap not only the pictures of the girl, but also those of the unfortunate parents.

Then he went on to explain the romantic nature of his own love.

It was only when he had finished that he remarked the change in the old lady's face and air.

The meaning of it suddenly rushed upon him, and it was like a plunge from the pinnacle of hope to the depths of despair.

"Ah, I comprehend!" said he, mournfully. "Fool that I am in my egotism! Simply as your adopted child, but with neither name nor fortune of her own, Angela might, perhaps, have been for such as I. But now as your heiress-protégée—the heiress to the Jekylls millions, in addition to her delicate rearing—she is indeed beyond the reach of Bernard Nixon, the poor student, Nixey the nameless, the ex-street Arab, the outcast, the wanderer!"

The old lady stammered out something unintelligible. Her face was full of pitying sadness, but there was that in it that did not altogether deny his words.

"Wait!" she managed to say, as he hastily rose; "your own antecedents may be explained away—that is, proved to have been respectable in their origin. At all events, I do trust you implicitly in all this, Bernard! Proceed with this search, command my purse, my influence. Angela shall owe her rescue to your hands. All may yet be well with you, although—that is—"

He again kissed her hand, but with grave humility.

"I resign my hopes, but accept the charge," said he. "Angela shall be restored to you—to wealth, to freedom and to happiness, though nevermore to the love, the worship of my pauper's heart! Adieu!"

He had repossessed himself of the pictures, and was gone before Mrs. Traitner could entreat that he might linger.

At the hotel, Nixey was handed a telegram in cipher to the following effect, from Rye:

"Angela is thus far unharmed, and Janet is near her. Come by the early morning train."

"Elmer."

Nixey availed himself of the few remaining hours for rest, and caught the five o'clock morning train.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE RUINED TOWER.

THE boy, Elmer, looking pale and tired, was waiting at the Rye Station as Nixey stepped from the train in the fresh early air.

"Come," said he, taking his young master's hand. "I will lead you at once to the vicinity of the Goldheim house, but the utmost caution must be taken."

"That stands to reason," said the detective.

"But shall we not require a conveyance?"

"No, sir; it is not such a great way."

As they left the village behind and proceeded toward the Sound, Nixey remarked his companion's pallor.

"My poor boy!" said he, gently; "you have overtaxed your powers."

"No, no, sir; it is not that," said Elmer, with an effort at cheerfulness. "I am simply a little tired."

And he went on to give a full report of his mission.

They struck into a beautiful shaded rustic lane that presently led them to a ruinous factory building, embowered in trees and not far from the water's edge.

It stood on a bluff, however, and from one corner a tall tower, blackened by fire and partly dismantled, rose above the tree-tops.

There was a winding flight of iron steps in the interior, much broken and twisted by the action of fire, but still available.

Elmer led the detective to the summit of the tower, from which he could look down upon a rather handsome villa at the edge of the Sound, with a number of out-houses near it, and with a small cottage, or boat-house, within a stone's toss of the piazza.

Several small sailing-vessels and row-boats rocked at their stakes in the bright water. A mile beyond, across a level flat, there was a cheap summer hotel, with its outlying bathing-houses, dancing-pavilion, and the like. But the villa

and its immediate environments were secluded and set apart, as if jealously guarded against intrusion from the outside world.

"Well, here we are, then," said the detective, taking in the situation at a comprehensive glance.

"The Goldheims have the villa, of course?"

"Yes."

"And the boat-house?"

"Powder Billy's, a cunning and unscrupulous Hungarian, already completely in the Goldheim interest."

"Oho! This old building here—what was it before being wrecked in this way?"

"A dynamite factory."

The detective gave a low whistle.

"I see. And Powder Billy was like enough once employed in the works?"

"Yes."

"But now?"

"He supplies dynamite on the sly to Anarchist agents and bomb-manufacturers in New York, who come and go altogether by water, to divert the suspicions of the authorities."

"Ah! doubtless under the guise of fishing-excursionists?"

"Exactly."

"And where does Powder Billy procure his explosive, with which to supply this secret trade?"

"From a lawful factory, probably by false pretensions, somewhere back of the village."

Elmer then went on to explain the situation in detail.

"Goldheim has been established here less than a week, yet he is already perfectly secure. His villa is filled with servants, surly foreigners, devoted to him body and soul. Czar is not the only ferocious watch-dog having the run of the house-grounds. Powder Billy and several other ruffians are within call. No one approaches the villa without undergoing a jealous inquisition. Angela is as yet unaware of the true character of her host, who passes himself off as an old friend of Mrs. Traitner, whom he pretends to be expecting a visit from at any hour. But, should the young girl manifest any downright suspicion as to the true state of the case, she would find herself a declared prisoner on the spot. This is all at present."

The detective looked at his informant with a sort of wonder.

"How in the world have you found out all these things in so short a time?" he exclaimed.

"Janet is now in Miss Goldheim's employ. In a short time she will be wholly in her mistress's confidence."

"Ah! and you have already communicated with her?"

"Yes."

Nixey clasped the boy in his arms.

"You are invaluable!" he exclaimed. "My dear lad, I am hopelessly your debtor! Unaided by you, I could have accomplished nothing."

But Elmer struggled to free himself from the embrace, with burning cheeks, and as if suffocating.

"Really, sir, no time is to be lost," said he.

"I am now going to find Janet, and send her to you. You can have fresh information, especially with regard to the young lady, from Janet's own lips."

The detective was now regarding him curiously.

"True," said he.

The boy started to withdraw, but hesitated.

"I—I may not be able to return at once," said he.

"Why not?"

"Well, Janet has shown me how to slip into the grounds in quest of her, on occasion. But I may not be able to slip out again at once without detection, or perhaps without compromising my cousin. That would not do, sir."

Nixey smiled.

"Surely," he said to himself, "the boy is in love with his fair cousin. This explains his strangeness."

"As you will, my lad," said he, aloud. "I shall await Miss Aylmer here. But beware of the dogs!"

"I shall manage, sir," said Elmer; and he darted down the steps.

Nixey saw him come out of the foot of the tower, disappear among the trees, and then caught a glimpse of his graceful figure once more stealing off in the direction of the villa, but after that there was no following his course.

He remained alone in his airy retreat fully half an hour before a light step on the insecure stairs apprised him of a visitor.

It was Janet Aylmer, who approached holding out her hand.

"How very much you resemble your cousin!" said the detective, advancing to meet her. "I could have thought you were he, but for your gown—and what a becoming one it is!"

Janet was looking pale and anxious, but a brief color was called into her cheeks by his kindly words.

"Elmer and I were frequently mistaken for each other when children," said she.

And then she at once proceeded with the business in hand.

"The situation is about this way in the Goldheim household, Mr. Nixon. I am but newly a member of it. Miss Traitner, as she is called, is as yet unsuspecting of her entertainers' designs.

She is admirably lodged and obsequiously attended, but her every movement watched without her knowledge. But her 'grandmother's' failure to put in an appearance, in accordance with Goldheim's promise, may open the girl's eyes at any moment. The mask will then be unceremoniously dropped, and her captivity assured in a strong room already provided. It is on the second floor of the boat-house. In the meantime, either I or Elmer will be in constant communication with you. That is if you are not prepared for the shortest way out of the difficulty, which is to effect her release publicly and at once, by legal process."

Nixey made a gesture of dissent.

"Ah, then we must bide our time," she continued. "In the mean time, my Cousin Elmer—"

She was interrupted by a movement far below, and there was heard a heavy tread ascending the steps.

"Fly! hide yourself!" she whispered. "Anywhere, or—"

But the detective, even in the turning of her head, had disappeared.

At that instant, the intruder, who proved to be the Great Bear, stepped into view on top of the tower, and smilingly approached her.

CHAPTER XVI.

JANET'S STRATAGEM.

JANET dissembled her uneasiness.

"How did you know I was here, sir?" said she.

"By guesswork, as I saw you slipping off through the grounds," was the reply. "Miss Goldheim sent me after you. She could not understand."

"Understand what?"

"The odd suddenness of your disappearance so soon after—"

"I shall explain, I shall make amends! The strangeness of this ruin tempted me to explore it. I shall be with Miss Goldheim very shortly. Pray, say so to her."

The young giant laughed in a suspicious way, but, nevertheless, turned to go.

Then he paused, looking around, and apparently noting that the castellated wall surrounding the flat roof on which they were standing effectually concealed them from observation from the surrounding grounds.

Then he suddenly grasped Janet's hand.

"I always admired you at the hotel," he exclaimed. "Don't you remember that I did?"

The girl indignantly repelled him.

"What was that to me?" she cried. "Earnest Mandel, don't you dare to touch me!"

But he was not insulting; indeed, quite the reverse.

"Don't be afraid of me—I wouldn't harm a hair of your head, Miss Aylmer!" said he, pleadingly.

"You shouldn't dare to!" said she, sharply. "Go about your business!"

"But I'm awful unhappy!" said he, ruefully. "I'm more afraid than enamored of Sophie. She rules me with a rod of iron—I daren't say my soul's my own in her presence!"

Janet was in secret agony. How had the detective disappeared without bodily casting himself over the giddy edge? Not very likely, of course; but the tower-roof was bare of anything behind which he could have successfully hidden; and the mystery remained that he had effected his evanishment somehow.

"Do go away, sir!" said she, impatiently.

"What is all this to me?"

"It ought to be something to you!" cried the Colossus, passionately. "I'd have never made love to her if—if you had only vouchsafed to—to like me a little, Janet."

"But I never have and I never shall!" she cried, thoroughly exasperated. "Return to Miss Goldheim this instant, sir, or—I shall acquaint her with your disloyalty!"

"Oh, don't do that, Janet! Surely you wouldn't do that!"

And he precipitately hurried down the steps with a boyishness that would have tempted her laughter at another time.

Hardly had he disappeared before the detective vaulted into view from outside the wall, whither he had been hanging with his fingertips clutching the outer edge like a bat on a cornice.

Janet looked at him in astonishment, and then stepping to the roof-wall, looked over and down.

The distance to the ground was not less than a hundred feet, to the nearest embosoming tree-top more than thirty.

"How could you do it?" was all she could say.

Nixey laughed as he opened and shut one of his hands, while drumming with the fingers of the other on the battlement.

"They never fail me, you know," said he. "However, if the boor had been more persistent in his annoyance, I should have had to dis-close myself."

"He would not have dared!" said Janet scornfully.

Nixey laughed again.

"The poor devil!" said he. "Little cause as I have to love him, there is something simple and

innocent in the great overgrown fellow. Pity he isn't in better company!"

She did not reply, so he went on in a business-like way:

"Now to resume, for I can understand how pressed for time you must be. Your last words before the interruption, were, 'In the mean time, my cousin Elmer—'"

"Oh, yes! Well, he cannot rejoin you immediately, but will be concealed about the place to help either you or me, as expediency suggests."

Nixey thought this somewhat strange, but was not disposed to quibble.

"As you please, then," said he. "Now let me say that I am greatly astonished by what you tell me with regard to—Miss Traitner, but more especially on one point."

"What one?"

"Her phenomenal credulity, as thus far displayed. It is astounding!"

"I agree with you there. But after I shall have had an opportunity of winning her confidence I shall be better informed on that point."

"Now to business. A public rescue is not to be thought of. Mrs. Traitner will not hear of it, and, for my own part, a 'sensation' of the affair might seriously interfere with my plans. What, then, Miss Aylmer, from your present knowledge would you advise?"

The young woman reflected.

"This is my advice. The girl will doubtless ere long expedite harsh measures toward herself. She will, then, I am pretty sure, be confined over the boat-house. The only chance of a secret rescue would then be by water. You might be posted somewhere (this place would never answer) whence you could both command an uninterrupted water-view, and at the same time be in readiness with a boat on receiving the necessary information from Elmer or me."

"Excellent! Where is there such a post of observation, think you?"

Janet pointed across the flats to the pleasure resort alluded to.

"What place is that?" asked Nixey.

"Beek's Rye Beach Hotel."

"Ah! I have heard of it before."

"It is open day and night the year round," continued the girl. "Either disguised, or perhaps in your own character, you could live and roam thereabouts for days, mixing with the country guests, excursionists and picnic groups, without detection."

"I have the cue," said the detective, promptly. "And I shall go in disguise as an amateur fisherman. Good-by! I feel that I can count on you."

"To the death!" exclaimed Janet, giving him her hand; adding under her breath, with a sigh, "If it breaks my heart!"

They descended the tower together, and then separated.

Nixey had left a well-stocked valise at a hotel near the station, and hastened thither to effect the proposed change in his appearance before seeking the hospitalities of the seaside resort.

Janet fairly flew back to the villa, fearful lest her absence should have already counted as a black mark in her counterplot against the plotters.

Miss Goldheim, early as was the hour, quitted the piazza, where she had been conversing with Angela and Earnst, and came through the shrubberies to meet her, quite angry and mystified.

"You are a strange young person, Janet Aylmer!" she exclaimed. "Here you arrive at an unseemly hour, and no sooner do I engage you than off you disappear in the woods like a madwoman!"

Janet resolved to play her cards boldly at the very outset.

"I had forgotten something," said she.

"That was all, Miss Goldheim."

"Well, I hope you've recovered it! Where is your trunk?"

"At the station, miss."

"It shall be sent for. Now come to breakfast."

Early as was the hour, the rest of the household had already breakfasted.

But Miss Goldheim, wanting to talk to the new-comer, accompanied her to the table, nodding amiably to her guests in crossing the piazza.

At the same time Janet had nothing but eyes for Angela, whose beauty, she had to confess, surpassed anything she had ever seen.

Heaving an inward sigh, she, nevertheless, assumed a hard, resentful expression when seating herself at the table.

CHAPTER XVII.

JANET'S BOLD GAME.

SOPHIE and Janet had been intimate for a number of years, so that there was more or less camaraderie between them, which Miss Goldheim, being nothing of a snob, was willing to preserve.

"What do you think of my guest, Miss Traitner?" she asked, after the appropriate preliminaries.

Janet seemed to clear her brow of its rising frown with an effort.

"You know my frankness," said she. "I don't like her at all!"

"Why?"

"She looks enough like that miserable murdered girl Mattie Braun, to have been her sister."

Miss Goldheim started.

"A chance resemblance, of course! But what of that?"

"Heavens, Sophie! Can you ask? Hasn't the case of the creature referred to brought enough misfortune on me and mine?"

"But your father, I learn, has been released on bail."

"True; but not acquitted."

"Still, he may be, and then—"

"I should still hold the girl's memory in dislike, and—any one resembling her excites my antipathy; though of course your present guest, as your guest—"

Miss Goldheim made an impatient gesture, while a sudden light seemed breaking in upon her.

"I understand now," she interrupted. "You used to think that Bernard Nixon secretly admired Mattie."

Janet was a better actress than she had known. She colored furiously, and her eyes flashed.

"I hate Bernard Nixon!" she said, in a low, intense tone.

Miss Goldheim looked yet better satisfied.

"Ah! but you have not always hated him?"

Janet made no reply.

"Suppose," said Sophie, after studying her intently, "suppose I should tell you that this young girl, my present guest, is the real object of Bernard Nixon's love—his idolization?"

For an instant Janet's face was a picture of jealous fury.

"I—I—with due respect to yourself, I should not believe you."

Sophie drew her chair closer.

"Janet, I can prove it!" said she, with much suppressed eagerness. "It is true. Make common cause with me, and you shall not be my maid, but my friend, my good friend, as you were once, only more so!"

"I do not understand."

"I, too, once loved Bernard Nixon—to madness—and now hate him—hate him with the quintessence of hatred that is the phoenix birth from love trampled and scorned—love to ashes turned! There can, therefore, be no rivalry between us two. Let there be partnership instead—partnership in hate and in revenge!"

Slow and difficult at first, the words had at last rushed from her lips like molten lava.

Janet looked up, half-suspiciously, half-cagorly.

"I—I still don't quite understand," she faltered.

"You must, you shall! Listen, Janet. Is your hatred of Bernard Nixon such that you would still revenge yourself on the object of his worship, knowing that it would torture him, heart and soul?"

Janet drew a long breath.

"I will still be frank," said she. "Yes; I would do as you suggest, with the opportunity. Would I? Tortures of the lost! if I only had the chance!"

Her suppressed rage was painful to witness; her hands clutched the knife and fork as if they were daggers.

"I can trust you—I am sure of it!" said Miss Goldheim, contentedly.

"I am glad you say so."

"Listen, Janet. This girl, Bernard Nixon's secret idol, is only my guest in name. She is in my power, no matter how, and I would destroy her!"

"Destroy! Surely not—"

"No, no; not murder, of course. But I would torture, wound, rend, ruin her; and all for the sake of wringing *his* heart!"

Janet looked up eagerly.

"Still, it is incomprehensible," said she. "The young girl is at this moment your guest, you say."

"Till it suits me to drop the mask. But come." Janet had finished the repast. "There is much more that I have to tell you."

She led the way back to the piazza.

But the mask had already been cast aside.

Mr. Goldheim was also there now, and he had just apprised Angela that she was the victim of a trick.

The young girl had started to her feet, and was confronting him and Mandel with the scared look of a gazelle in the lion's clutch.

"Ah, but you cannot be in earnest!" she cried. "You could not be so cruel."

"My child," said the ex-innkeeper, with the smile of a madhouse proprietor with a fresh 'patient' in his remorseless grip, "you shall be cared for."

The Great Bear snorted out one of his original guffaws.

"Oh, yes!" he repeated; "you shall be cared for, my dear."

"Then my grandmamma is not coming at all? She will not even know what has become of me?" wailed the girl.

"Not unless she is a clairvoyant, which isn't likely," said Mr. Goldheim.

"Oh! why have you carried me off? What are you going to do with me?"

Mr. Goldheim grasped her arm.

"That is undecided as yet," said he, oracularly. "You must be *cared for*."

He pronounced the words with a peculiar emphasis that seemed to give them a deadly significance.

Angela broke away, and rushed to Miss Goldheim.

"You, at least, cannot be in this cruel plot!" she cried, wildly. "You are so handsome, so agreeable; in you at least—"

The words died on her lips.

The positively fiendish exultance on Sophie's dark face repelled her as a rock of granite does the leaning wave.

Angela clasped her hands, her lovely face and form piteous and pleading in their eloquence.

Sophie burst into a harsh laugh.

The girl turned to Janet.

Here was a new-comer, also a woman and an attractive one, to whose womanly tenderness she might not appeal in vain.

But, by a great effort, Janet also turned a stony face to the agonized appeal.

Angela covered her face with her hands, sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, what have I done to be treated thus?" she wailed.

Suddenly a new idea seemed to strike her, and she looked up.

"Are you robbers?" she cried; "and are you stealing me away for a ransom? I have heard of such things. Tell me frankly if you are robbers."

All were silent except Earnst, who, however, was demonstrative enough for all.

He threw back his head, inflated his chest, and gave vent to one of his ursine roars of merriment, that shook the house like an earthquake.

"Because, if you are," continued the girl, when able to make herself heard, "my grandmamma is rich. She will reward you handsomely for restoring me to her. But then, you must not maltreat me. My grandmamma loves me so dearly, she would not pay so well for me if you had not treated me kindly."

This stroke of innocent diplomacy amused the giant yet more.

He roared in a manner that would have excited the envy of Bottom, the Weaver, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Then, suddenly snatching the girl up in his arms like a doll, he nodded to Goldheim.

The latter, followed by his daughter and Janet, at once led the way toward the boat-house, Angela seeming too dazed to make much resistance or even outcry.

She was thrust into the strong room that had been prepared for her.

Janet, at Miss Goldheim's insistence, was following, when Goldheim, not understanding the side-compact, so to speak, made a gesture of dissent.

"What is that for?" he asked.

"It is arranged," said his daughter, briefly. "I shall explain presently."

And, with a parting whisper for Janet's ear, she pushed her in after the prisoner and secured the door.

Angela had thrown herself, sobbing, into a chair.

Janet waited till the retreating footsteps had died away, and then slipped to a window.

Assuring herself that neither of the trio had lingered within hearing, she went to the sobbing girl and lightly touched her.

"Hush!" said she. "Dry your tears. I am here to befriend you."

Angela was naturally taken by surprise.

"You?" she faltered.

"Yes. My seeming interest with your enemies was but a blind. Have confidence in me."

The hard look had vanished from Janet's comely face. Its melancholy remained, but this was permeated with a self-sacrificing resolve and commiseration that were good to see.

With a last sob, the young girl responded to the unlooked-for caress, holding up her tear-stained face, like a neglected child taken back once more to the soft mother-breast.

"That is well," said Janet. "Now time is precious with us. Confide in me as in a sister."

"What is your name, please?"

"Janet."

"What a pretty name! Janet, I shall conceal nothing."

Janet was as much charmed by the girl's ingenuousness as by her beauty, but she nerved herself to business-like considerations purely.

"Innocent as you are, you do not seem to be a fool," said she. "By what representations could these people, perfect strangers to you, have persuaded you from your home?"

Angela had met the Goldheims and Earnst at the Battery, as we have seen.

"That must be the young lady," Sophie had exclaimed. "Ask her."—"No, no; it might be a mistake," said Mr. Goldheim.—"I think she is Miss Traitner, though," said Earnst: "she answers to the description her grandmother gave us but a short time ago."—All this in the wondering Angela's hearing, though seemingly without intention.—"Miss, excuse me if I am in error," said Goldheim, at last; "but are you

Miss Angela Traitner?" "Yes, sir."—Sophie clapped her hands, the gentlemen looking radiant.—"We are in search of you, my dear young lady!" cried Goldheim: "I am your grandmother's oldest and best friend, Mr. Goldheim. You are to go with us. We are commissioned by her to look for you while looking at the parade. Pray step into the carriage."—"What, you say my grandmother sent you for me?" "Yes." "Why, it is not two hours since I left her at home, and came away with Nora. What has become of her?" "Never mind Nora; she will hasten back to your grandmother, who is waiting for her. In the mean time, you are to accompany us to our country place. Your good grandmother is already packing up to follow us. Come, you must not keep us waiting, my dear, or your grandmother will be very angry." Angela had stood hesitating, and not a little bewildered. Then Sophie had sprung out of the coach, with her most fascinating smile, and even taking her in her arms. Nora had run back to the spot, but only in time to see her charge whisked beyond her reach.

That, substantially, was the whole story.

The momentary halt at the Astor House had been made merely to avoid possible inconvenient observation during the unavoidable detention caused by the street show.

After that the blandishments of the abductors had been pursued with the necessary skill and continuity.

During the recital, in a naive and deliciously original way that it would be impossible to reproduce, Janet regarded the narrator with mingled wonder and admiration.

"You are a marvel—a Miranda in real life!" said she. "A young woman in years, a child in spiritual innocence and transparency!"

"Am I a Miranda?" said Angela, brightly. "I am glad of that! I once saw *The Tempest* performed in the theater. The young actress who played Miranda was just lovely—she looked like a water-sprite!"

And then she went on to give the details of her simple but pathetic history, with no less candor and delightfulness.

Sudden y Janet's disengaged ear, so to speak, ever on the alert, caught the sound of an approaching step.

"Hush!" said she, with a warning gesture. "Now I must be hard and stern. We must be very careful."

Then, with sudden harshness, she raised her voice, saying:

"Stop your whining and sobbing, you little fool! How should I know what they're going to do with you? Pillow you on rose-leaves and feed you on sweetmeats till they're tired of you, perhaps! You say that is what you have been accustomed to."

And she closed with a mocking laugh.

Angela took up the cue, and, on Miss Goldheim suddenly entering the room, she was sobbing and moaning, as at first, the picture of girlish hopelessness and misery.

Sophie wore a highly satisfied air.

"Come, Janet," said she, peremptorily, and with a venomous glance at the prisoner. "Our pretty little bird must be left to her meditations."

She at once took her departure with Janet.

A capital dinner was brought by an ill-favored maid-servant in the middle of the day.

As Angela had eaten scarcely any breakfast, she was ready to do justice to the contents of the salver in spite of her heaviness of heart.

The servant had not remained an instant.

After discussing the more substantial dishes with an excellent appetite, Angela raised the cover from an elegant dessert with considerable satisfaction.

"Charlotte Russe and ice cream! How delightful!"

But as she was about to attack the first, with the ice in prospect, a small slip of writing came in view:

"On your life, taste not of the dessert! Destroy this writing."

Such was the warning.

It goes without saying that it was heeded, and with a grateful shudder.

Angela's prison was a large and sparsely-furnished, but not unpleasant room, occupying nearly the entire upper part of the boat-house.

It had formerly been used as a billiard room, the marking-wires, lamp-fixtures, cue-racks, and the like still remaining intact, only the tables having been removed.

There were four windows, one in each of the four walls, the views from all being interesting and including both sea and shore.

In the evening Janet came again, and alone.

The young girl ran to her as to an only friend.

"Oh, you are here at last!" she sobbed, kissing her. "Thank God! thank God!"

"Hush!" said Janet, responding to the caress with a fervor that surprised herself. "I am to pass the night with you."

Angela embraced her again.

"You are yet alive, thank Heaven for that!" continued Janet. "Was the servant surprised, on returning for the tray, at your having left the dessert untouched?"

"No; and I watched her narrowly."

"Then she could have known nothing of the poison in the cream. I was not certain of that; though the Goldheims would not take many into their confidence."

At the word "poison" the girl had turned deathly white.

"Was it really poisoned?" she cried.

"Yes. Speak lower—under your breath even unless I signal you otherwise."

"Poisoned! Ah, it is like a bad dream! Did you know of it?"

"I suggested it."

Angela recoiled with a stifled cry, but almost instantly comprehended the situation, and resumed her frightened, nestling attitude.

"They were bent on quicker, more violent methods," explained Janet. "I pleaded for the poison, to gain time—fortunately with success."

Angela clasped her hands.

"Ah! I can hardly realize it," she murmured, with quivering lips. "Why can they desire my death?"

"For your money—the wealth to which you are the rightful and sole heir!"

Angela looked bewildered.

"You cannot understand this yet," said Janet. "Let it rest. No one else has visited you?"

"Not a soul."

"Have you heard anything going on below?"

"Yes; once a man singing, as if to himself, in a surly voice."

"Nothing more?"

"Some rough men came in a sail-boat. I heard, without distinguishing, their voices in the room underneath. Then they loaded their boat with some strange-looking packages, and sailed away. That was all."

Janet stepped to the window that looked across the water toward the summer resort.

A man was sitting below the bluff with something like a telescope in his lap.

Night was falling.

The man leveled the glass, and then lifted his cap.

Janet responded to the signal.

Angela had noted it all with breathless suspense.

"Who is that man?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ELMER ON DECK.

In answer Janet turned with such a changed expression in her face that Angela was startled.

Love, hopelessness, despair, self-abnegation—but ah, at what a cost!—were at once depicted in that struggling, pain-wreathed look.

"The man who loves you!" came the answer, hoarse and choking; "and whom you love in return!"

Angela was yet more bewildered. She had unbesombed not only her history, but also her secret life, to this new, seemingly last-remaining friend, including her dream-loved ideal of youthful manhood, as described already by Mrs. Traitner to the detective.

But this was still no more than a dream, a delicious vision, a treasured picture of her romantic nature, scarcely yet conceived of as a possible reality.

"What man?" she repeated.

Janet forced back her darker thoughts, the divine self-surrender of her spirit coming out the victor, and she clasped the girl to her bosom.

"The young man of your confession—the hero of your one meeting—the youth of your dreams!" she exclaimed. "Child, it is he!"

For Angela, it was like the crystallization of an ideal.

"Impossible!" she murmured.

"It is even more!" said Janet. "You are the object of his idolization as he is of yours! The speaking glance, the fateful soul-flush in the crowd, was mutual."

Angela clasped her hands, burning blushes lent their rich mantling to her loveliness, and a soft tremor agitated her sweet frame.

Janet's generosity was unstinted. She drank the bitter cup, once that it was raised to her lips, deeply and to the dregs.

"For the love I bear him, I will even do more than surrender him," she thought, with something of the martyr-spirit of old days. "I will complete the spell of fate, I will add the last thrilling link to the magic chain, I will place my rival throned in the heart that I can never fill!"

She told all, so far as she had been able to gather from the jealous ravings of Sophie Goldheim.

Bernard Nixon might never know what she, the neglected, the perhaps despised Janet, was doing for him, and for her lost love's sake, but none the less was her self-immolation perfect and complete.

Women are not often thus heroic, but when they are so the sacrifice is worthy of the altar that inspires it, and sweet must be the sacrificial smoke in the nostrils of the Divine Supreme, which after all is Love, Love only, and Love forevermore!

"I no longer fear my enemies. Death itself is no longer terrible!" said Angela, simply. "I am still in a dream, but it is a dream of happiness!"

The man under the bluff repeated his signal, now but dimly descried amid the deepening of the shadows over the waters.

Janet responded again.

The man disappeared, but presently a light sail-boat, with him and one other in the waist, glided out of the cove, crossing the intervening liquid space with a slow, majestic sweep, and then hovering within gunshot of Angela's prison-house like a halcyon of the waves.

"He will come for me!" whispered the young girl, her delicate hand tightening in its trembling clasp upon her companion's arm. "I shall be rescued, and by him!"

"Yes; if all goes well. He but waits the securer darkness to make his eagle swoop for the pure dove of his deep tenderness!"

Angela suddenly threw her arms around Janet, and kissed her.

"What shall I not owe to you?" she murmured.

Janet might have truthfully answered, "More than you can ever dream of, infinitely more than you can ever pay!" but she only responded mechanically to the caress, and then gently put aside the clinging arms.

"We must make our preparations," said she. "And first I must let you into a secret, with which Bernard is already acquainted."

She had before this told Angela her lover's name.

"Bernard!" the young girl softly repeated to herself. "What a strong and lovely name it is! But tell me the secret, Janet."

Janet pointed to a small trap-door in the ceiling.

"You will divine that there is a narrow loft overhead," said she.

"Yes."

"A friend of Bernard's, a cousin of mine, is in hiding up there."

"A man!" exclaimed Angela, with a startled look.

"A very young man—quite a lad, in fact," said Janet, with a smile. "I concealed him there this morning, before you were brought here. He is devoted to Nixey."

"Who is Nixey?"

"Bernard Nixon. That is his nickname—one that he may some day render famous in the annals of detective bravery and enterprise."

"What a funny name! I don't like it so well as Bernard. But, since it is his, I shall soon like it well enough."

"No doubt."

"And I shall like this young man, too. What is his name?"

"Elmer—Elmer Faithful."

"Oh, that is just beautiful!"

"I am glad you think so, for presently you will have to deal with Elmer, instead of with me."

"Indeed! How is that?"

Janet had availed herself of a rickety step-ladder, which she had placed under the trap in the ceiling, and was now ascending.

"I am about to send him to you," said she. "In the mean time, I shall not return."

"Not return!"

"No; it is essential that some one should keep a lookout from above. Remain perfectly quiet, and, remember, perhaps everything may depend on your own discretion."

Janet disappeared through the trap, carefully closing the lid behind her.

In a few moments it was reopened, and Elmer Faithful descended the ladder in her stead.

The dusk had thickened, but Angela could still notice the boy's graceful figure, and the soft lines of his pale, melancholy face, with its incipient blonde mustache.

"Cousin Janet has told me all," said Elmer, briefly. "You are now to trust implicitly in me."

As he spoke, he nimbly replaced the step-ladder, double-locked the prison door on the inside, for which certain bolts were fortunately provided, and then ran to the window overlooking the water.

The sail-boat still hovered on the verge of the in-gathering darkness, its sail half drooping in the quiet air, like a tired but anxious bird with half-folded wings.

The boy made a peculiar signal, which caused the two shadowy figures in the boat to suddenly move about, alert and active.

"Wait now," whispered Elmer. "I must first see if all is quiet below. If anything should happen to me—"

He came to a pause while half-way out of the window, on the roof of the narrow veranda that ran partly around the house.

"What then?" questioned the young girl, breathless with excitement.

Elmer pressed a small pistol into her shrinking hand.

"Are you afraid of it?"

"No." And Angela's hand, though still trembling, closed resolutely on the weapon. "At school, we sometimes fired at a mark in the woods, and I was reckoned a good shot for a girl."

"Tis well. Should the worst come to the worst, you will use that. You understand?"

"Yes."

The boy glided along the narrow roof with the agility and noiselessness of a chipmunk on a fence-line.

Sounds of life enough were given forth by the

villa and its surroundings, but the boat-house itself might have been a neglected tomb, for all the signs of animation it afforded.

Elmer slipped back to the window, and gave a last signal, just discernible, to the men in the boat.

At almost the same instant, he held out his hands, and assisted the lovely prisoner out upon the roof.

Once there, overlooking the little dock directly in front of the main entrance below, the pair waited.

A light breeze had sprung up, and the rescuing craft, shaking out her snowy wings, was silently sweeping toward the dock, like a great messenger bird eager for its goal.

Elmer let himself down, and held up his arms for Angela to drop lightly into from her perch on the veranda roof.

But here the sail-boat touched, and Nixey sprang lightly ashore.

"Hist!" he called out. "That task is mine."

And he bounded forward, gently thrusting the lad aside, so that Angela, dropping lightly from above, found her first shelter in his arms, instead of Elmer's.

It was a thrilling, a romantic moment.

For the second time in this world did those fate-led beings meet, and this time—Destiny strange and sweet!—it was beating heart to heart, though but for a wild, bewildering instant.

An instant of Paradise, yet understood by both to the impetuous, delirious full!

A second exchange of soulful glances in the danger and the dusk, a first embrace necessitated by the emergency, and their youthful lips met in a coy, impassioned kiss such as parted angels, rejoined at last, may sometimes know, but is so little of earth's fairest boons as to be seldom felt or imaged or conceived.

"Fly! The moment speeds! Away!"

The words were Elmer's though so hoarse and choked as hardly to be recognized, and his also was the grasp that tore the lovers from their pure embrace, and hurried them toward the boat.

"Hurry up!" called out Nixey's assistant from the deck. "Jump aboard!"

But at that instant the dock, or bridge, from which the trio were about to step across the thwarts, suddenly popped up into the air, under the shock of a dull, vibrating explosion from somewhere underneath, and they were left hanging on the string-piece, at a considerable elevation above the water.

"Cut in, and seize 'em!" cried a loud voice from the boat-house. "Grab the gal, but no mercy for the man or boy!"

CHAPTER XIX.

DANGER AND DYNAMITE.

THE astounded fugitives had hardly time to turn their heads before half-a-dozen men and a huge dog, led by Powder Billy himself, rushed upon them, amid a flash of lanterns and a roar of curses, shouts, growls and epithets.

"Steal, all!" cried the detective, thrusting the girl behind him with one gesture, and with another flooring the foremost assailant with a flush blow between the eyes. "Smithers, below there, catch the young lady when she jumps!"

"All for love!" hissed the boy Elmer, his pistol flashing its discharge with instant death to the bulldog, and then flying through the air with a crashing blow in Powder Billy's face. "Strike to kill!"

But at this instant the boat-bridge, released from its momentary support, flopped down into the water as suddenly as it had sprung up.

Both boy and detective were thrown from their footing by the shock.

True, the man in the boat, Smithers, at that instant lashed out with an oar, knocking a second ruffian off his pins and seriously disabling a third, but by this time the assailants, momentarily repulsed, were getting in their best work.

Nixey and Elmer were unceremoniously tossed into the water, before they could regain their footing, and Powder Billy snatched up the now fainting Angela in his arms.

Others were now rushing down from the villa.

"Robbery!" cried Goldheim's voice. "Spare none!"

"Kill them all!" roared the Great Bear's. "Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! It is a battue, a tally-ho!"

Elmer would have been drowned, but that the detective supported him to the boat, now fast drifting out into the Sound.

A moment later, and all three would-be rescuers were straining their eyes back to the fast receding dock, from which, fortunately, no craft had as yet started in pursuit.

"We're dished!" growled Smithers; "and all along of that infernal jumping dock of Powder Billy's!"

Nixey roused himself from his first stupor of despair.

"I can't believe it—it is too horrible!" he murmured. "Oh, God! to think of Angela being again in those wretches' power! But

Janet is there to befriend her still; that is our sole remaining hope."

"But Janet can do little now!" cried Elmer, suddenly springing upon the gunwale. "Her hands must be strengthened!"

"What would you do?" exclaimed the detective. "Stop!"

"I shall save her—Angela—for your sake, Bernard, or die with her! Be on the lookout for news!"

"But stop! Boy, I command you! This is madness!"

Elmer had, however, plunged into the sea.

Thoroughly recovered from his first shock, the boy now seemed to swim like a dolphin.

He turned but once in the water, to wave a farewell with his boyish hand, and then glided away noiselessly into the darkness.

"He'll reach the shore—let him go!" said Smithers. "I know a good swimmer when I see one."

He was trimming the sail so as to head once more for the hotel.

Nixey crushed back his disappointment with the odd, gritting sound of his teeth that was peculiar to him under great excitement, and accepted the situation perforce.

"To think," said he to himself, "to think that I had my prize almost there, and that it escaped me!"

There was another gritting sound; he was mechanically opening and shutting both his powerful hands before him in the gloom.

But there was no rubbing out the half-humiliating fact.

Nixey's Nip had clutched at danger's boon, but, having missed its iron clutch, had not held on!

"Oh!"

His hands closed on the stout gunwale, in a sort of paroxysm.

There was a crunching, wrenching grasp, a shivering sensation through the craft, and even Smithers turned from the tiller in a sort of wonder, as the tough timbers shrunk and quivered in the vise-like strain, but that was all.

"What operated the dock in the way that baffled us?" said Nixey, after a gloomy pause.

"Where was the trick, if trick it were?"

"I can see it all now, sir," said Smithers, "though I didn't suspect the dynamite at first."

"The dynamite?"

"Yes, sir. Powder Billy puts the infernal stuff to many uses. They do say as how, in an emergency, he could blow up the hull point back yonder, by a twist of his hand, like a house of cards."

"But the dock, the boat-bridge?"

"Well, sir, he's got some arrangement by which he can flop her up and down at his pleasure, and all by the use of dynamite, too, or something of the sort. That's all I can say."

He might have added that it was all he knew.

Smithers was an honest, but not over-intelligent shore-man, whom Nixey had allied to his interests directly after taking up his post of observation at Beck's Hotel.

As they were about to step ashore, a sudden inspiration seized the detective.

"I have it," he exclaimed, striking his forehead. "The tower!"

Smithers looked up in astonishment, but, being familiar with the neighborhood, almost at once seized the meaning of the words.

"Right you are, sir!" said he. "Or, at least, it's as like to be the tower now as anywhere else."

"Get the necessary provisions without any delay," said Nixey. "I'll look after the boat. We may spend the night on the water, but it is our only chance now."

He gave some more distinctive orders, and Smithers hurried away to carry them out.

The boat-house would scarcely be chosen as Angela's prison again. What more likely place for selection than the deserted tower of the ruined factory building where he had already, by the merest chance, made the discovery of its facilities.

This was the idea that had struck him so forcibly, and upon which he was about to act with his customary decision and energy.

Half-an-hour later, with Smithers again at the helm, the detective's cutter once more shook her canvas wings to the night breeze, and glided out over the silent waters of the Sound.

In the mean time, Angela remained in her swoon, clasped in the arms of Sophie, one of the last to hurry down to the boat-bridge, while the Goldheim party surveyed the field of their rather dear-bought victory.

One watchdog (not Czar) dead, two men badly injured, and Powder Billy himself with his face still bruised and bloody from the pistol hurled by Elmer's unerring hand!

These were the casualties.

Powder Billy was not long in describing how he and his men, while keeping dark in the boat-house, in expectation of a certain heavy order for explosives by water, were suddenly made aware of the attempt to escape, and had rushed to frustrate it.

"There were two that dropped from the veranda roof—the boy and the gal," said he, in conclusion. "That's what puzzles me, for how

could the lad have shinned his way up there without the dog or me knowing it? Poor Ponto!"

He bent over the body of his canine friend with a pathetic gesture.

"You were all dumb or blind, it stands to reason!" said the innkeeper sternly. "It's a sheer piece of luck that the girl wasn't carried off completely."

"She would have been, if I hadn't sprung the dock-trick on 'em. Up she bounced and down she flopped, in obedience to the torpedo-jump I invented, and then they were done for! The trick has got me out of many a scrape before this one."

"The young woman, Janet Aylmer!" suddenly exclaimed Goldheim; "where is she?"

"The Lord only knows, sir!" said Powder Billy, scratching his head.

"Gone—flown, after betraying her trust, most likely!" said Sophie, grinding her teeth. "The traitress!"

"But that remains to be seen," said her father. "Our captive can alone answer the question. Ha! she is coming to. Quick, up to the house with her!"

But poor Angela seemed only to come out of one swoon to pass into another.

The fact was that it was now only pretense with her. Suddenly imbued with wisdom and cunning by the gravity of her new peril, she was now thoroughly alive to everything going on around her, though to all appearances still more or less unconscious.

Fully half an hour elapsed after she was carried to the villa, before she passed from that species of dissembling to a more intelligent one.

Then, deeming that Janet would have had time to frame some excuse for herself, if not already beyond the reach of possible vengeance, a new idea struck the young girl as she gradually responded to the attempts to effect her restoration.

"Come; no more of your childishness!" said Mr. Goldheim, at last shaking the girl into a sitting posture. "Understand that you are back once more in our power!"

Angela opened her eyes, and began to sob bitterly.

"Alas! I do understand it," she murmured through her tears.

"Where is Janet?" said the innkeeper, roughly. "What has become of her?"

Suddenly Angela stretched out her hands, in one of which she still held the small pistol tightly clutched that Elmer had given her, and which she remembered to have discharged just before really fainting away.

Dissimulation on the part of a novice often attains at a single leap the duplicity of a veteran in the art.

"Ah!" she cried, looking at the weapon with a shudder; "I must have killed her. Oh, she is doubtless dead!"

"What do you mean?" they exclaimed in a breath.

"Oh, I scarcely know! But directly after that young man had slipped this thing into my hand through the window, I—I fired it off at Janet's back just as he was springing upon her! Oh, much as I hated her for her harshness to me, I did not mean to kill her! But now!"

She flung away the pistol, covering her face, as if to shut out the ghost of the murdered woman.

Mr. Goldheim picked up the weapon, and examined it.

"One chamber is really discharged!" said he, indignantly. "The girl must be speaking the truth. Run, Earnst, to the boat-house! See if the unfortunate young woman may be still living!"

As Earnst disappeared, he turned to his daughter.

"So, the gardener's daughter has, perhaps, served us better than we thought for," said he.

Sophie nodded.

"Still, I can scarcely believe the story," continued Goldheim. "This deed at the hands of such a child! It is hardly credible!"

"If it be true, I begin to respect her," said Sophie. "I wouldn't have deemed her capable of so bold an act."

Angela had bowed her head in her hands, as if still overcome with the anguish of remorse.

In a few minutes Earnst's heavy returning step was heard.

As he entered the room, Angela looked up with a cry of affected relief, while the Goldheims were unaffectedly gratified.

He bore in his arms the form of Janet Aylmer, still breathing, and in fact very much alive, but just as he had found her on the floor of the strong room, securely bound with strong cords, hand and foot, neck and heels.

And Janet was not only very much alive, but also pale, even palpitating with furious indignation or a capital counterfeit of such.

Earnst had been conveniently loquacious while carrying her through the grounds, and she was well prepared to carry out the deception that Angela had set in motion.

"Only let me at the minx!—the murderous little serpent!" she screamed the instant her eyes fell upon the girl. "I'll scratch her eyes out! I'll spoil her beauty for her!"

Released from her bonds, she even rushed toward Angela with such fury as to require the interference of the two men and Miss Goldheim.

"Let me at her!" she raved. "She tried to shoot me in the back. Don't you understand? It was a mere chance that I escaped her treachery. Can't you let me at her?"

"Not here and now," said Miss Goldheim, soothingly. "Why, Janet, who would have suspected you of such fury? Have done, my dear—at least for the present!"

They gradually succeeded in mitigating her seemingly boundless wrath.

"Never mind!" said she, retiring to a corner of the room, with a venomous look. "Of course, I am sorry to have made such an unladylike exhibition of myself, but—I can bide my time!"

"So can I!" cried Angela, a changed look of desperation coming into her face like a flash. "I am almost sorry now that I did not kill you!"

There was a general stare of astonishment, but sensation seemed to be in season just now.

"You are all a parcel of robbers and fiends!" continued the young prisoner, apparently growing absolutely reckless. "But only wait! My grandmother is rich and powerful; she'll soon make you all suffer for your indignities to me!"

The Great Bear haw-hawed till the house shook, while Miss Goldheim only smiled craftily.

"To the chimney-chamber with her!" said Goldheim. "I'll answer for her security there, at all events."

Angela was summarily escorted out of the room by Earnst and Janet, while Sophie remained to confer with her father.

CHAPTER XX

CONSPIRATORS IN COUNCIL.

"THE girl's guardian must indeed be kept quiet," said Sophie.

"True, and it is about time to feed her with a fresh bulletin," said Goldheim, calmly.

He seated himself at a desk, and wrote the following dispatch:

"No harm shall come to Angela. Shall effect her deliverance, without publicity, inside of a week. In the mean time, don't communicate with me in any form, or you may ruin all."

This was dated at "Beck's Hotel, Rye Beach," and was signed with Bernard Nixon's name in full.

It was a second false dispatch to Mrs. Traitter, its predecessor, of somewhat similar import having been sent early in the day.

"This will doubtless answer," said Sophie, looking over the written words. "If our messenger only continues to hoodwink Nixey, time will be given us for the consummation of our plot and to spare."

"There can be no doubt as to that. The messenger is a true Anarchist, and our creature, body and soul. He obtains such telegrams as the unsuspecting Nixey desires to send, dispatches our messages in their stead, and then comes to me with his report. You will find him in the kitchen, waiting for this dispatch at this moment."

Sophie hurried away with the false dispatch, and quickly returned.

"It is gone," said she, quietly. "What do you think will be Nixey's next move?"

"We can't foresee that until some other spy comes in from the Beach with his report. At all events, he can hardly know of the tower's existence."

"I think not. No one would suspect it as a young girl's retreat."

"It was fortunate that we thought of fitting up that secret chamber in reserve."

"It was, indeed. Well, what next, father?"

"We can trust Janet now?"

"I should say so—absolutely!"

"How would it do to try the poison again in the morning?"

"Dangerous! I am sorry for even the attempt that was made."

"Perhaps you are right. We'll think it over. If hard pressed, we have still the secluded Long Island retreat to depend upon until—until we can make sure."

Sophie fell into a thoughtful mood.

The dark beauty of her face was showing signs of care. She looked all of her twenty summers, and more too, when thus buried in thought, though her countenance brightened when she smiled.

She smiled now.

"The New York lawyers are with us," she said.

"Yes; but at a monstrous price."

"I understand; one-third of the entire estate, to be paid in money value as soon as I am installed in the character of Angela Braunfels as the sole heir."

Goldheim groaned.

"There is no help for it," said he, ruefully.

"None whatever. Are they aware of Angela being in our power?"

"No. Not unless Nixey can have notified them, which is not likely."

"Why?"

"He is intensely shrewd. He must have already suspected their honesty. That alone would have kept him non-committal."

"True. At all events, the lawyers are ready to stand by us at the first assurance of the real Angela's death."

"They'll have to," said the innkeeper, laconically. "I've got 'em dead!"

He alluded to certain correspondence between the lawyers, Crosswise and Shortcut, and himself, which he imagined to have already committed them to his plot.

"In that case," said Sophie, "the sooner the better. Expediency, with a due regard to our own safety, is the only thing to be considered."

Her progenitor smiled a little proudly, for he honestly rejoiced in the bold unprincipledness of this daughter of his—a true chip of the parent block in every sense, he was frequently bound to confess.

"The morrow will doubtless brighten up our designs," said he. "In the mean time, suppose you say good-night to our captive in her new quarters; or shall I?"

"I shall go."

But, after putting on her hat and wrap, she returned.

"But for this Nixey's intermeddling," said she, "we could choose our own time in the affair. That is about the situation, I believe."

"Yes."

"Have you enough of the Brotherhood on his track, think you?"

"So many that he can scarcely stir without being fatally immeshed, sooner or later. An Anarchist bludgeon, bullet, dagger or bomb ought to be in readiness for him at almost every move he makes."

"But this fellow Smithers, who, according to our spies, is now assisting him?"

"Faithful—but, let us hope, not incorruptible."

"The boy, Elmer?"

"True to his master, of course. Curse the boy! he is ubiquitous. Next to Nixey himself, there is none other we ought to dread so much."

"Be of good heart, my papa. Doubtless the bludgeon, bullet, dagger or bomb that is in Nixey's destiny will be equally unsparing of the ubiquitous youth. You will await my return?"

"Yes."

As she was taking her departure, he drew her toward him and kissed her forehead.

"Child of my heart," said he, "I am not used to a display of tenderness, as you know. But, by this kiss, I greet you in advance as Angela Braunfels, soon to be the undisputed heir to the Jekylls millions!"

Contradictions and inconsistencies of vice and sin!

There was a simple majesty, unassociated with bombast, in which this was said, and it was accepted with a proud and filial smile.

"A splendid forecast!" murmured the daughter, returning his caress. "May I be worthy of it?"

A moment later she was hurrying through the dark and lonely grounds, accompanied solely by her great dog, Czar.

She was, however, occasionally conscious of other footfalls as stealthy as her own, or perhaps here and there an indistinct figure flitting through the paths, as an indication of the place being constantly if secretly patrolled.

The room that had been fitted up in the ruined chimney-tower was but a little below the summit, and so cunningly concealed at one side of the interior winding stair as not to have been observed by either Nixey or Janet on their visit to the roof, as heretofore described.

The entrance was now securely guarded by three men, stationed one above the other on the ruinous steps.

From one of these Sophie received the key in silence.

With this she opened the door of the prison cell and entered it in almost perfect silence, but the watchful Janet was not caught off her guard.

On a narrow pallet, in one corner of the miserably-improvised room, lay the prisoner, apparently in profound slumber after the exhausting excitement of the evening's adventure.

Watching her slumber, with a sinister look in her face, as revealed by the gleam of a lantern swinging from the ceiling, sat Janet.

She looked up, with a pretended start, at Miss Goldheim's stealthy entrance, but that was all.

"Ah, I felt sure you would come," said Janet, composedly. "And I am glad."

She further signified by a gesture that the prisoner was not likely to awaken, and the visitor seated herself on the only other chair in the room.

"It is not yet eleven o'clock," said Sophie, in a low voice. "But why are you glad that I am come?"

"I have a proposition to make."

"What is it?"

Janet arose, but paused.

"Where is Czar?" she asked.

"Where I left him, just outside the door."

The room contained one window, looking out and down the sheer descent of the tower-wall, a plunge of nearly, if not quite, ninety feet.

Janet beckoned to her visitor.

Passing softly around the foot of the pallet, they both approached the window.

"Look out and down," said Janet.

Sophie did so, not without a shudder.

"What an abyss!" she murmured. "Some one is moving down there among the trees."

"It is Earnst Mandel."

Sophie was surprised.

"I thought him home and abed long ago," said she.

"I suggested his remaining where he is, feeling sure you could spare him for the duty."

Sophie smiled her approval.

"Spare him!" she echoed. "When not useful, he is an unmitigated bore. But what do you propose?"

"That you set Czar on guard down there in the same place."

"You surprise me. There is no entrance down there to guard."

"None."

"What do you mean?"

"The window ledge is low. The light might be put out. Angela might hear a cunningly counterfeited whisper in her ear. She would awake, thinking it the voice of the boy Elmer, which I can imitate to perfection. It would bid her arise, and follow him in the darkness. She would obey. The voice would lead her to the window, instead of the door. 'Step over the door-sill and into the passage,' it would say. 'Your lover awaits you a few steps below.' She would make the step, and it would be her last. Amy Robsart's fate would be repeated in hers, on the cruel roots and stones far, far below there!"

Sophie regarded the calm face of the proposer of this fiendish plot with unaffected astonishment.

"And the man and dog below?" she inquired.

"The one could be an intelligent witness of the 'accident.' The other—well, a startled crunch or two of his massive jaws would, at least, put the victim out of her misery."

Sophie shook her head, and they resumed their seats.

CHAPTER XXI.

NIXEY'S SECOND ATTEMPT.

"THE plot is ingenious, but too complicated," said Sophie, after a pause. "It would not do."

Janet looked disappointed.

"My father or I will doubtless soon devise some less objectionable means," continued Sophie, with commendable cheerfulness. "In the mean time, do you but guard the girl faithfully. Though, for that matter, her rescue from this place would be little short of impossible."

She had not ceased to study Janet's face curiously, though seemingly unawares to the latter.

"With a guard, yes," said Janet. "The tower is strong."

"No; but with little short of no guard at all, a rescue would be next to impossible."

"But why?"

"Because of dynamite."

"Ah!"

"Yes, the entire tower could be blown to atoms on a minute's notice, as easily as the boat-bridge was jumped up and down in obedience to a hidden touch."

"I am greatly surprised. Is your father, then, connected with dynamiters?"

Sophie hesitated.

"He has certain influence with them," she admitted, "and they come here from great distances to obtain supplies of the explosive from Powder Billy."

"That must be a terrible influence, then. I don't see how the dangerous explosive can be supplied on demand thus openly."

"It is not supplied openly. Powder Billy obtains it *sub rosa* from the legitimate factory not far away."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes; and let New Yorkers beware! Chicago is not the only city of this country where Anarchists secretly swarm. Plots are even now hatching in the shadow of the Excelsior State flag that may yet blossom in fire and blood, should those Anarchist leaders in Chicago be treated to the hangman's rope."

There was a brief silence, during which Janet suddenly noticed the intensity of her companion's regard.

"Why do you look at me so intently?" she asked.

"The change in your character continues to astonish me," said Miss Goldheim. "You have become so furiously savage and resentful against that chit of a girl—you who were of old so gentle and self-contained!"

"But I am not furious now."

"No; your hatred has merely assumed a less violent but more baleful and deadly turn, that is all."

Janet gave a sort of shiver.

"Heavens and earth," she exclaimed, hissing-ly; "if you knew all you would cease to wonder at it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! you may have loved Bernard Nixon as I have, but you cannot have seen what I have."

"Speak! seen what?"

"Her in his arms!" with a loathing gesture toward the motionless figure on the pallet. "Bound and gagged as I was, I could see it all from the window in the uncertain light."

"What! has she responded so quickly to Nixey's romantic passion?"

"As water to water, or as fire to fire. That young ruffian, Elmer, was the first to drop down from the veranda roof, but it was he, Nixey himself, who, reaching up, received the girl in his arms. They kissed, they embraced, they clung—oh! the recollection of it is madness—torture!"

"Sophie sprung to her feet, her own face convulsed, her hands clinched."

"I wonder at the revolution in your nature no more!" she hissed. "Had I witnessed that I—I would have torn her piecemeal or I would have died!"

She leaned hovering for an instant over the motionless figure, her face hideous in its hatred, her stretched-out hands bent like the talons of a ravenous bird.

"Patience!" she muttered, in a muffled hoarseness of tone; "her doom is near."

"And you, too," said Janet, in a low voice, "you also love him still?"

"Still! No, no! I hate him! That is—oh! I hardly know! I am only sure that, since he cannot be mine, I would gladly see him dead!"

Janet could not help inwardly contrasting her own love for the detective with this ignoble passion, and it made her shudder.

"I can but echo your feeling," said she. "Let us take heart, though. For Nixey must rush upon his fate sooner or later, must he not?"

"Undoubtedly! He is as good as doomed! Our spies fairly surround him. Even the messenger who carries his telegrams for Mrs. Traitor is in our interest. So you can judge what sort of reports must reach the good lady."

"Ah!"

"Yes; to repeat my father's words, Nixey is beset with secret foes, and an Anarchist bullet, or dagger, or bomb must sooner or later dispose of both him and his young man Friday, the boy Elmer. Good-night, Janet; and I need no longer bid you be faithful to your trust!"

Sophie quitted the room.

Janet waited until assured of her having not only quitted the tower, but also its neighborhood in Earnst Mandel's company.

Then she stole up to the pallet.

Angela, whose unconsciousness had only been assumed, was already sitting up, trembling and white.

"I heard all!" she murmured. "Oh, it was appalling!"

Janet clasped her in her arms.

Her self-effacement had become a routine duty now; she could love and sympathize with the unfortunate young girl unrestrainedly and without betraying a spark of her whilom jealousy.

"Let us wait and trust!" she whispered. "Try to take your natural rest now in my arms."

"But I feel so lost, so abandoned! In what can we trust, Janet?"

"In Providence and Nixey."

Angela felt comforted.

She nestled like a frightened child in those protecting arms, and was soon fast asleep.

At the first gray of dawn, Janet, who had herself fallen into an uneasy drowse, was made aware of a slight movement outside the window.

Letting Angela slip back upon the pallet without waking her, she stole to the casement.

A dark body swung back and forth like a pendulum between the opening and the sky.

"Hist!"

The voice was from mid-air, and yet was it recognized.

The dark body was Nixey, suspended by a stout cord from the summit of the tower.

"Is Angela within?"

"Yes. Thank God you are come! But how did you get here without wings or a balloon to assist you?"

Nixey gave his low, infrequent laugh, that was still such music to the young woman's ears.

Stopping the pendulous motion of the rope, he pointed to the rough stones of the wall.

"Have you forgotten my ascent of the hotel lightning-rod?" said he.

"No; but there is no lightning-rod here; only the scarcely projecting-edges of the rough stones."

"They were enough."

And he stretched forth one of his hands, softly opening and shutting it in the dim light.

Nixey's Nip!

"Yes; she understood it at last, though the feat suggested seemed hardly the less incredible."

"Of course you must have seen Elmer again," said Nixey.

Janet paused before answering.

"Yes," said she; "but without communicating with him as yet. He must be in hiding somewhere about the grounds."

"I suppose so; though I had hoped to meet him ere this."

And he related the manner of Elmer's desertion of the boat.

In return Janet related how, after Elmer's es-

cape from the boat-house with the girl, she had effected her own bondage, hand and foot, in the manner by which she had retained the confidence of the Goldheims and their crew.

"It was a lucky stroke of policy, and your woman's wit is just wonderful," said Nixey.

"But I am afraid the trick cannot be successfully repeated, in the present case."

"Yes it can, or one as good. Let me but descend with Angela and you now. Elmer will doubtless rejoin you somewhere below. After that I shall take care of myself."

"You might accompany our flight."

Janet shook her head.

"No; that would not do."

"Why not?"

"One young woman, your Angela, would be enough for you to take care of."

"What do I not owe you? I swear to devote myself to you, scarcely less than to Angela!"

A sort of electric thrill shook the young woman's frame, but she was firm in her refusal.

"I am resolved," said she. "Let me but see her safely in your arms, and I—I shall be content."

"But your own life would be in danger at the hands of her baffled pursuers, should they over-haul you."

"I shall attend to that, I tell you! Swing yourself into the room, if possible."

Nixey effected this with the lightness of a bird while Janet hurriedly awakened the prisoner, with the necessary precautions.

She blew out the light, as she did so.

The lovers had melted into each other's arms, with the naturalness of two dewdrops finding themselves in glistening juxtaposition on the same flower-stem, suddenly slanted by an amorous wind.

The consciousness of it was as torture for Janet, but she set her teeth hard, and made no sign.

"Come!" she only said, after a bitter moment.

"Not an instant of time must be wasted."

Wasted!

Were moments accorded to the delirious endearments of youthful lovers, newly rejoined ever wasted, think you?

Such moments are the most precious pearls of price in the rich treasury of immortal hours.

But the detective was speedily alive to the demands of the emergency.

Janet was first lowered to the ground, where the faithful Smithers was in waiting, and she carried a considerable bundle of clothing with her.

Angela's turn came next.

Nixey followed, no attempt being made to regain the rope, which was accordingly left dangling.

"To the boat!" growled Smithers. "Lose no more time!"

But at this juncture Angela had given way under the excitement, necessitating a fresh resort to the shelter of her lover's arms.

Janet took advantage of the situation to suddenly disappear with her bundle.

"To the boat!" repeated the shoreman, this time with a muttered oath under his breath.

"This instant!" said Nixey. "The young lady is too overcome to help herself."

"Pick her up and carry her, then! Blast it all, sir! Do you forget that we're three hundred yards from the water's edge?"

On this suggestion, Nixey, under self-restraint before, snatched up the lovely girl in his arms.

"Forward, then!" said he.

But at this juncture Elmer Faithful, pale and breathless, dashed out of the wood.

"Run! hasten!" he panted out. "You are pursued—the escape is discovered!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A FIGHT FOR A SWEETHEART.

THERE was no time for a more definite warning.

Off they dashed in the direction of the beach, Nixey half-carrying and half-supporting the fainting Angela.

But the entire intervening woods seemed to be suddenly swarming with lurking foes.

Indeed, seven or eight of them abruptly bunched together in the path of the fugitives, thus necessitating a temporary recoil toward the foot of the ruin.

But here at least a dozen men were seen emerging in the uncertain light; and at the same instant a hue and cry was heard from the direction of the villa itself, mingled with the hoarse baying of Sophie's bloodhound.

"Back to back, with the girl in the center!" hissed the detective, the long barrel of his seven-shooter glistening from the stern pressure of his tiger's grip. "Stand fast and wait for the words!"

Elmer's revolver was also in readiness, while Smithers was armed with a boat-hook of formidable weight and dimensions.

The fearful odds were closing in upon the devoted trio from all sides, when suddenly Powder Billy dashed out of the ruin.

"Back, for your lives!" he shouted. "I thought them still on the tower-roof. The train is fired!"

Back in a confused mass, pursuers and fugitives, swayed the contestants, engrossed for the

instant with the prime consideration of personal safety.

Then there was a crash, a roar, an earth-rending jar, and the entire factory ruin, together with half the tower, collapsed in one crumbling, smoking mass.

Nixey gave the necessary order in a low voice, audible only to the ears of his own party.

It was acted upon with the utmost promptness.

Before the smoke had thoroughly cleared away, the fugitives were out of the woods, and hurrying over the long stretch of marsh and sand for the spot at which the sail-boat had been left.

But it was now more than half-light, and the whole mob of guards and spies were clamoring in hot pursuit, with—*mirabile dictu!*—Miss Goldheim herself, accompanied by Czar and two other fierce dogs in the lead.

Undeterred, apparently by her dress, she was coming on like a cheetah in chase of its prey, a revolver in her hand, the midnight splendor of her hair streaming in the wind, her dark face convulsed with rage and malice.

"Run them down!" she screamed. "A purse of gold for the hand that strikes Nixey or his boy Elmer to the earth!"

"Is it the age of the Furies or the Amazons that has come again?" thought Nixey, flinging a last look over his shoulder as Angela was borne along like the merest feather in his mighty grasp; and then he shouted aloud: "To the boat! to the boat! A last spurt of this speed, and we are secure!"

But fatal chance!

At this instant the fugitives became aware that the boat—was gone!

Another glance, however, detected her in the hands of four miscreants, who were pushing her out over the shallows, while wading.

The water was already up to their knees; in a brief space they would have her in the deeper water, and the fate of the fugitives would be sealed.

But they were dealing with a man whose moral grip on opportunity was as unconquerable as his physical clutch on whatsoever held taut or gave way under the invincible power of Nixey's Nip.

"After it!" called out the detective, in his steely tones. "The boat must be recovered! Never say die!"

Then he was splashing through the shoal water, with Angela still in his arms, still attended by his faithful followers.

"Give them a volley!"

To turn in the water, and half-empty their revolvers at their pursuers, with the effect of momentarily checking them, was but the work of an instant on the part of Nixey and Elmer, and then the rush for the boat was continued.

Two of the canine pursuers had received their death-wounds, though Czar had escaped, but the pursuit was checked by the water, for all of Sophie Goldheim raging along its edge, vainly calling upon her wild followers to go on.

"Yonder's an empty boat!" she cried, pointing to a row-boat rocking at its stake far out in the shoal. "Coward! if you do but gain that, their retreat is hopelessly cut off."

She was even rushing into the water herself when Earnst Mandel—now just arrived at the villa, and taking in the situation at a glance—darted after her, seizing her in his powerful arms, and then splashed on triumphantly.

Encouraged by these examples, the majority of their followers also took to the water, yelling furiously, and now and then discharging a firearm.

But by this time Nixey and his party had overhauled the sail-boat.

The four scoundrels in charge of her were speedily disposed of.

Smithers's boat-hook was in deadly play at last, to the serious discomfiture of two of their number; a third was floating on his back, wounded in the leg by a shot from Elmer's pistol; while the fourth was being pounded into insensibility between the thwarts and spanker boom by the clubbed revolver in Nixey's disengaged hand.

"In with you!" cried the latter at last, tenderly setting Angela into the craft, which was now well afloat, and leaping after her. "Shake out the sheet, Smithers, and give her to the wind!"

This was done as soon as Smithers and Elmer were aboard, and then the graceful craft, like a winged creature, began to "walk the waters like a thing of life."

"Hurrah!" cried Elmer. "Saved at last!"

But the pursuers, though now up to their waists in the water, were still within gunshot, and Powder Billy still had an infernal device or two to fall back on.

"Ware of torpedoes!" suddenly shouted that worthy, for the benefit of his friends in the water. "The cove is just paved with 'em!"

And then, in his little sentry box on a jutting point of sand, he studied a rough chart for an instant, after which he pressed a tiny brass knob in a sort of keyboard at his side.

There was a dull, barely perceptible concussion.

Then the sail-boat with its inmates, sprung

into the air on the glassy summit of a glittering water-mound.

It descended in fragments, its unfortunate inmates being scattered in different directions.

One of the first to recover from the torpedo-shock was Smithers, who found himself floating far from the shore in deep water.

Fortunately, the rowboat, jarred from its fastening, was floating uninjured near at hand.

As he crawled into it, and remarked with satisfaction that it contained a pair of oars, he also noticed a half-senseless form struggling in the water but a few feet away.

It was Nixey's.

The stunned detective began to recover almost the instant that he was dragged into the boat.

"The others—Angela—Elmer!" he cried, staggering into a seat in the waist. "Where are they?"

Smithers, a moment before, might only have answered with the poet's lament over the boy who had stood on the burning deck:

"Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strew the sea!"

but, as he had had an opportunity for a fresh observation, he simply pointed in the direction of the shore, with the laconic response:

"Look, and see!"

The detective did so, and groaned aloud.

Angela's insensible form was in the grasp of the Great Bear, who was triumphantly wading with it back to the beach, Miss Goldheim following.

Elmer had evidently been tossed by the force of the explosion far back toward the shore.

At all events, he was now seen running for the woods like a startled antelope, with a dozen or more dripping ruffians in hot pursuit, but with a fair chance of outfooting them.

They presently saw him gain the woods, considerably in advance of his pursuers.

The detective threw himself dejectedly in the stern of the rowboat, while his companion applied himself to the oars.

"Cheer up, sir!" cried Smithers, rounding the point, and heading once more for Beck's Beach. "Better luck next time!"

Nixey shook his head.

"They'll make sure of their beautiful victim this time," he murmured, "if she is not already dead."

"No danger of her being dead yet," was the cheery reply, "or they wouldn't have picked her up. And as for the villains putting the sweet thing to death, she's gone through a tough scrapping already without giving in. Besides, remember that we're living in free America at the present time, and not in the dark ages."

For some moments the detective seemed overpowered by his despondency, but he was not long in rallying.

"I do remember that!" he suddenly exclaimed, starting up. "But, in spite of that, I also remember that we free Americans, native and foreign-born, are living beset by cowardly, pestilential conspirators against life and property and honest industry—conspirators whose favorite weapon is the favorite dynamite bomb, whose sole propaganda is to destroy what they cannot undeservedly share—and who will assuredly crush out our institutions and our liberties, if we do not crush out them, like the moral lepers and scorpions that they are!"

"Hear! hear!" cried Smithers, delightedly, dropping the oars to clap his hands. "Them's the true-blue sentiments, governor!"

But Nixey was already half-provoked at himself.

"Well," said he, more soberly, "we seem to be in some such conspirators' nest, at all events, and we must fight our way through it or die in the attempt."

"True for you, sir!" And the oars were resumed.

"And to do that we must change our base."

"How so?"

"Janet—she's a friend in the enemy's camp—assures me that my every movement is carefully noted by one or another of Anarchist spies in the Goldheim interest. Even the rascal at the hotel whom I have been hiring to carry my telegrams to the village station is regularly in their employ."

Smithers opened his eyes.

"So!" he grunted. "Well, we'll attend to his case as soon as we get ashore."

But, on reaching the shore, this particular offender was found to have prudently disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BAFFLED, BUT HOPEFUL.

ANOTHER day had gone, and dusk was again gathering over the waters, as Nixey and his assistant once more betook themselves to their sail-boat—a stronger and better craft than the one that had been wrecked—and set out over the waters from the bold promontory of Beck's Beach.

The intervening hours had been spent in alternate watch and rest, but without affording them a clue as to what fresh disposition had been made of the recaptured Angela.

Bitterest disappointment of all, not a returning sign on the part of Elmer, upon whose anticipated return the detective had mainly relied

for the much-needed information on which the quest could be renewed, if at all.

The first surprise was in store for the adventurers on their arrival in the vicinity of the Goldheim villa.

The entire place, together with its surroundings, was as completely deserted as if it had not been occupied for a twelvemonth.

No precautions were longer required in pushing the investigation thereabouts.

Not a servant, not a spy was encountered; not the bark of a watchdog disturbed the hush that had fallen; the boat-house was as deserted as the villa, or as the blackened walls of the factory ruin itself.

It was at the foot of what remained of the old tower that the disconsolate heiress-hunters came to a dejected pause at last, after a more or less thorough exploration of the rest of the abandoned grounds.

The captors had disappeared with their victim as mysteriously as any eagle had ever faded into its native obscurity, after its predatory swoop, with its bleating lambkin in its talons.

Whither, or in what general direction?

That was the question.

"Something tells me," said Nixey, "that hereabouts, if anywhere, Elmer or Janet would have left me some message or sign. If we find not such a one we may conclude that both are already dead, victims to the vengeance of our crafty foes."

Presently Smithers, who was rummaging a little in advance, lantern in hand, looked up with a snort of satisfaction.

"Here's a scrap of a gal's handkercher," said he, "tacked onto the door-post."

Nixey possessed himself of the fragment with a spring, and began scrutinizing it by the light of his own lantern.

He presently made out the following words, which had apparently been scrawled upon the handkerchief with a burnt match end, or something of the sort, but were now almost illegible:

"Gone to Greenwich by rail. Inquire at post office there. Angela is well; Elmer a prisoner; myself still trusted. JANET."

"This is news, indeed!" said the detective, after reading the message aloud. "Shall we go to Greenwich by rail?"

"What for, sir? To find the post-office shet up, and nothin' left but to lie around an' wait?"

"How far is it by boat?"

"Twenty miles, sir; an' the boat would come handy in case they've skipped across the Sound."

"By boat it shall be."

After setting sail again Nixey fell into another fit of despondency over the possibly miserable fate of Elmer Faithful.

"I shall never forgive myself if it should prove that they have murdered him," said he.

"I had come to love the boy as a younger brother, and he was so good, so brave, so noble, and so devoted."

Smithers had a cheerful way of coming hopefully to the fore in cases of this kind.

"Never fear for the boy, sir," said he, promptly. "If I'm any judge of human nature, he's one of the sort to come out right side up with care in almost any difficulty."

Bearing in mind the lad's fertility in resources, Nixey was not long in also adopting this more hopeful view of the case.

As for Angela, though naturally tortured with suspense on her account, he was now less apprehensive on the score of her mere personal safety, on the general grounds that her death would have been compassed before this, save that the Goldheims were withheld by grave considerations for their own security, which would now be in greater force than ever by reason of the public attention already evoked by the extraordinary dynamite explosions in the vicinity of their villa.

They reached Greenwich in the middle of the night, but the telegraph office chanced to be still open, and Nixey availed himself of the opportunity to send the following dispatch to Mrs. Traitner:

"All dispatches heretofore received bearing my name, are doubtless forgeries. Angela still in the enemy's hands, but unharmed. Will write in full by first mail."

In the letter, which he lost no time in writing at a neighboring hotel, he gave the good lady the fullest particulars of his recent adventures, and concluded as follows:

"You have, doubtless, among your many friends some honest and capable lawyer in whom you can trust."

"Interest him without further delay in Angela's case."

"Unfold her past to him as I have unfolded it to you."

"Then direct him to communicate at once with Sloat & Johnson, Lincoln's Inn, London, the legal agents of the Jekylls estate, who have recently advertised for information of the missing heirs or heir."

"Let him have nothing to do with Messrs. Crosswise & Shortcut, their American representatives, Boreel Building, New York."

"I have reason to suspect those professionals of being scoundrels of the deepest dye, perhaps already in league with the Goldheims to effect the death or permanent disappearance of Angela Braunsfels, in order that Sophie Goldheim may successfully

pose as her counterfeit, and thus obtain possession of the estate."

"Do this without delay."

"Trust the rest to me, and the true Angela shall yet be restored to your arms."

Having placed this letter in the outer drop-letter box of the village post-office with his own hands, Nixey rejoined his companion, Smithers, whom he had left in charge of the boat.

"There is nothing left now," said he, "but to wait for the post-office to open in the morning."

It was past midnight, and the village, as a matter of course, was buried in profound slumber.

But at this moment a forlorn little boy approached the two men along the edge of the small dock on which they were sitting.

"Kin either of you fellers answer to the name of Nixey?" he inquired, quite independently.

"I can," said the detective. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," said the boy, "if you're expectin' a letter from the right person, I've got it to give you."

"Who gave it to you?"

"That's fur you to answer, as a password that it's all O. K."

"I am expecting one from a young woman."

"Give her a name, boss."

"Janet Aylmer."

"Mister, the password goes, and you're the important cuss."

With that he handed over Janet's letter.

It was as follows:

"At this hour, 4 P. M., we are crossing the Sound for Oyster Bay."

"Back of there, in the Long Island woods, Goldheim has secured a lonely farm-house, which is our present destination."

"It is near a Gypsy encampment, of which one Mag Withers is the presiding spirit."

"These are all the particulars in my possession, but the Gypsies are doubtless all shrewd rascals, more or less in the Goldheim interest."

"It is the intention to make way with Angela in this secluded spot, if practicable."

"Otherwise, the next change of quarters, I fancy, will be to the heart of some tenement-house district in New York."

"Angela is well. Elmer has effected his escape."

"I intrust this letter to a little tramp waf, whom I have met here by accident, as being likely to reach you sooner than the mail, should you fortunately have received my handkerchief-missive."

"Be doubly careful, for a number of the dynamiters accompany us to our new retreat. JANET."

"That's authentic, and no mistake," said Nixey, springing into the boat with an exulting bound, followed by Smithers. "Let us be off while the wind holds."

He had already rewarded the little dispatch-bearer, who still stood on the string-piece, viewing operations with a sort of wistful grin.

It suddenly occurred to Nixey to take the boy along.

"Anything more you want, my little friend?" he asked.

"Yes, boss."

"What is it?"

"A chew of terbacker."

Nixey laughed, and Smithers satisfied the request.

"Would you like to go with us?" was the next query.

For response, the boy gave vent to a hoodlum "hooray," and sprang into the boat with the agility of an organ-grinder's monkey.

The sail filled with the fresh night wind, as Smithers gave it a chance, and the boat glided out into the Sound.

"What is your name?" Nixey next asked of the boy.

"Waxy."

"Anything else?"

"Ain't that enough? How many names do you think a cove ought to have? Give us something easy!"

"Where are you last from?"

"Trampin' the Connecticut cross-roads with Tinker Jimmy and his moll."

"Where are they now?"

"In jail."

"Where were you from before that?"

"New York, all the time! I'm a Fourth Warder from my hat to my boots!"

And Waxy kicked up his little bare feet triumphantly, if not altogether consistently.

"What did you do in New York?"

"Scooped in cigar-stumps or picked pockets, 'cordin' to circumstances."

"Ever had any regular home?"

"Nary a brown-stone front."

"Any father or mother?"

"Nixy."

The detective started. Then he recalled the street slang that had given him his own sobriquet.

"What can you do?" he continued.

"Lick any galoot of my size from Catharine Ferry to Franklin Square."

"Well, Waxy, you'll do for the present. Serve me faithfully, and it may be to your advantage."

"Count on me, boss; I'm your Big Injun every time!"

Waxy thereupon contentedly curled himself up in the snuggest corner he could find, and was soon sound asleep.

Smithers had laughed loudly at the comical answers in the cross-examination of the boy.

But Nixey had retained his gravity, and was now reflective.

His sympathetic friendly feeling for the homeless street boy was but natural, considering his own early history, but at the same time gave rise to saddening thoughts.

"To such friendless and miserable extraction as this boy's can I only look back!" he thought.

"And what is it that the misfortune is yet to cost me? Doubtless Mrs. Traitner's continued scorn of my love for Angela Braunfels, who perhaps can never be mine."

At break of day the village of Oyster Bay, on the opposite Long Island shore was reached.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMONG THE GYPSIES.

AN hour later, after a substantial breakfast had been disposed of, and a budget of information gathered in, Nixey, in the character of a country horse-dealer, was approaching the Gypsy encampment of Mag Withers's band with his companions suitably rigged out for the new order of things.

They were in a light wagon behind a good horse hired for the occasion, while in leading were two sorry-looking equine brutes, purchased in the village for a song.

This outfit had been decided upon by the detective—who was, moreover, a good judge of horseflesh—as one likely to facilitate his intercourse with the Gypsies.

This he had explained to Smithers.

The latter, however, could not at first understand how the Gypsies could be associated with the Goldheim crew.

"In the first place," said Nixey, in elucidating his new move, "Janet thinks they are."

"Yes, sir; and what next?"

"In the next place, I understand that many of the wandering band are genuine Bohemian Gypsies."

"What of that?"

"In the third place, the majority of Goldheim's Anarchist followers are also Bohemians."

Then Smithers began to see the connection, though it seemed rather a distant one, as it may like enough seem to the reader.

But the fact remained that the Gypsies were in the immediate neighborhood of the Goldheims' new retreat, and Nixey was not without other reasons for the adoption of his fresh plan.

Arriving at the Gypsy camp after an hour's drive, the trio, which of course included Waxy, were soon dickering with such of the Gypsies as were familiar with the English language, though they all had a more or less smattering of it.

It was the hour for their morning meal; pots were simmering over the small fires; and there was a lively stir and chattering.

Presently an old woman's head was thrust out of one of the vans, and two piercing eyes were fastened upon the new-comers with more than ordinary interest.

Then a tongue belonging to the same picturesque personality called out some sharp words in the Romany dialect.

A swarthy young fellow, to whom the words had been directed, stepped up to Nixey.

"You're wanted," said he.

"By whom?"

"By our queen, Mistress Withers," and he motioned toward the wagon out of which the head had been thrust. "She wants to speak to you alone."

As Nixey approached the van, a very roomy affair, the door was thrown open from within, and he was curtly invited to enter.

He did so.

A handsome Gypsy girl was dismissed with a gesture, and the detective found himself alone with Mag Withers, the Gypsy Queen.

She was an old woman, but still erect and strong, and with a strange power in her piercing gaze, which was now fastened upon her guest with an intensity that made itself felt.

"Let me read your palm," said she, after a long scrutiny of his face.

Nixey laughed.

"My fortune may be in it," said he good-naturedly obeying, "though perhaps not in the mere lines, as you are accustomed to read them."

"Wrong! In its lion's grip alone there can exist no permanent fortune. That is in the womb of the future and of fate. Tell me your early history."

"You should know it without the telling, if you are so wise."

"Good! I shall repeat it to you."

And, in general terms, she did so, beginning with his earliest recollections and ending with his entrance into the medical college with a fidelity that was most surprising.

"Now," said she finally, "go back if possible in memory beyond the time of your finding yourself an ill-used street urchin in New York, a burden upon the drunken foster-parents, who at last threw you out to shift for yourself."

"I cannot," was the sad reply. "My memory reaches back no further."

"If it did, it would reach to a certain woman who possessed you at a yet earlier age, and who sold you to them—those others."

"How can you know this?"

"Because I was that woman."

"You?"

"Yes; but do not flatter yourself that I am your mother."

She laughed derisively.

"No; though you are swarthy enough to possess Gypsy blood, there is none of it in your veins. I stole you at three years of age."

"What do you tell me?"

"The truth."

"How am I to know that?"

"By three marks encircling your right arm above the elbow."

The detective was astounded.

"What are those marks?" he cried.

"Two blue rings, with a ring of pink between."

"It is true!" was all he could stammer out.

"Yes; they may have grown faint after all these years, but they were distinct enough when I pricked them on your baby arm in the long ago."

"What was your object?"

"That I might know you again, if needs were. A Gypsy woman always puts her mark upon a stolen child. Yours is the sign of my particular tribe."

"Do I bear any other?"

"Yes; one by which your own mother might know you—a birthmark. It is just above the rings I have described; a dark-red impression, resembling in outline a small parsley-leaf."

Nixey sunk back in his chair, almost overcome. These revelations, bearing upon a childhood heretofore wrapped in obscurity, if not in ignominy, as he had sometimes feared, filled him with strange agitation.

"Is my parentage known to you now?" he at last managed to ask.

"Perfectly."

"Is—is it respectable?"

"Yes, and better than that."

"Are my parents alive?"

"Your mother is."

"You will make us known to each other?"

"Never—save on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you shall learn at my pleasure, or before quitting our encampment, but not now."

"Woman, you torture me!"

"It will not be for long."

"Why did you steal me from my mother?"

"To wring her heart. The man who married her had loved me first, though without her knowledge."

"Ah!"

"A Zingarina never forgets and never forgives."

"You stole me, then, on purpose to abandon me?"

"Yes, when I should tire of you."

"Witch! hag! you are a fiend!"

"Not quite. Merely a Gypsy woman, who can hate, revenge, rob or restore, on occasion."

"Restore! Oh, you will restore me to my mother, then?"

"On the condition you are to learn presently."

"At least, tell me her name."

"That would be to yield up my secret."

"Inform me of the condition then, and at once!"

"Would you perform it so eagerly?"

"To know my mother? Ay; if to rush through fire or to stem the seas!"

"Nothing so arduous, I assure you."

"What then?"

"To wed a handsome girl, whose heart is already yours."

"You bewilder and amaze me!"

"Like enough. Remain so at present, for such is my desire. Now for another matter. What is your errand to our encampment?"

The detective was confused, in spite of himself.

"You're no more a horse-trader than you're the man in the moon," she went on.

He made no answer.

"Keep up your blind, though, if you choose. It will do no harm."

She made a by no means unkindly gesture of dismissal.

Nixey obeyed it in silence, and with such a flood of strange emotions as caused his head to reel.

As he stepped out of the van, the Gypsy queen's voice called loudly, "Meeta!" and, in answer to the summons, the handsome girl passed by him with a mischievous smile, and vanished into the van.

He had merely time to note that she was breathless and with a high color.

Seen from the encampment through the forest trees, was an old farm-house, with its various outbuildings.

Nixey felt instructively that this was the Goldheims' new retreat, but he asked no questions, and remained quietly among the gypsies for the remainder of the day.

Night coming on, and the spare horses having been disposed of at about one-third of their value, the detective was deliberating as to his next move when Smithers signed to him that something was in the wind.

At the same moment Waxy, who had been

roving with some of the gypsy lads, slipped by him, whispering:

"Get on to the big holler oak by the fence-line, boss! Some 'un's waiting for you there."

Nixey had already marked the spot, and presently found his way thither, without apparently attracting observation.

The Gypsy fires were already twinkling amid the dusk.

As he reached the hollow-oak, Elmer Faithful slipped out to meet him.

He would have clasped the boy in his arms, but was deterred by a warning gesture.

"Janet will carry off Angela at midnight!" whispered Elmer. "Wait for them at the railroad track, which is one mile due South of this."

With that, he suddenly disappeared, not having waited for a single word in response.

However, a word to the wise is sufficient, and Nixey returned to his companions with at least something definite in view.

An invitation to remain over night in the camp had been accepted.

For all that, at midnight Nixey and his friends, having eluded observation, as they thought, were making their way cautiously through the forest toward the appointed place, by an unfrequented track that gave hardly an echo to their wagon wheels.

It was moonlight, and presently the line of the railroad glittered in the pale light.

Two figures were waiting there, and there was the rumble of an approaching way-train that might be signaled to stop.

"Press on!" said Nixey, touching up the horse. "We may be in luck this time."

CHAPTER XXV.

A TRAMP-WAIF'S FATE.

ONE of the two figures in waiting was evidently Angela, but the other was as evidently not Janet, but Elmer.

"So much the better," thought Nixey, as the plan of the new order of escape suggested itself to him on the instant.

"Once on the coming train together, and New York or Hunter's Point is as good as gained already!"

He gave a signal, which was answered by Elmer, and sprung from the wagon, followed by his companions.

To secure the horse to a tree, and make a dash to join the waiting pair, was the work of an instant on the part of the eager trio.

But the longed-for junction was not destined to be effected.

A dozen Gypsies, appearing to spring out of the very earth, suddenly surrounded the bold Nixey and his companions.

At the same instant, just as Elmer was waving a red lantern to signal the stopping of the train, there was a shot from the other side of the wood.

Struck by a well-directed bullet, the lantern flew into fragments.

Angela shrieked.

Then there was a rush of several men, preceded by the Bloodhound Czar upon the devoted pair.

Nixey, struggling with the Gypsy odds, saw it all, while raging like a tiger in the toils, but was powerless to render help; and his companions, likewise hemmed in, though fighting desperately, were no better off than he.

This is what he saw, in distinct but bewildering flashes at that giddy moment.

The foremost of Elmer's human assailants went down under a well-aimed shot from the boy's revolver.

Again the weapon spoke, and a second ruffian bit the dust.

The assailants wavered.

But the boy's next shot missed its aim, and then Czar was upon him, open-mouthed, and with a deep-throated roar.

The brute's rush was, however, skillfully evaded, and then, as the useless pistol was flung aside, and before the infuriated animal could turn, a long, keen knife glistened in the boy's fearless hand.

The dog was upon him again, and so was the railroad train.

It seemed that Elmer was inevitably doomed, and Angela was on her knees in the moonlight, but a few paces from the rails, her hands clasped, her white face upturned to heaven.

But no!

Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the train, Elmer evaded Czar's second charge.

Then the knife, glistening in the moonbeams, was plunged to the hilt in the fierce dog, which, as Elmer leaped to one side, was then struck by the engine's cowcatcher, to be strewn in ghastly fragments along the iron road.

This was all that Nixey had time to note, for the struggle in which his party were engaged was also on the line of the railway, and at that instant a death-cry rung out, mingling almost with the dying yelp of the slaughtered hound.

It was from the child-waif, Waxy, who had been struck by the engine, and now lay pallid in death in the moonlight, while the great Express train passed on, and was gone in another instant.

At this juncture, also, both Nixey and Smithers

were finally overpowered, and when the former again looked at the spot where the companion-tragedy had been enacting, both Angela and Elmer had disappeared.

"Blast the luck!" groaned Smithers; "the poor little cuss is done for, an' no mistake."

Securely bound, he was in a sitting position on the edge of the slight railroad embankment, lugubriously contemplating the dead body of the poor little tramp.

The Gypsies were gathered silently around, some of them nursing their various injuries with scowls on their swarthy faces, and Nixey also deplored the sad fate of the all-but nameless waif.

"What is the poor boy's fate but what mine might have been—unwept, unfriended, with no more loss to the world than that of a trampled weed!" he said to himself. "God rest these nameless remains! and may the untutored spirit that animated this poor, broken little tenement find a home at last in Him who sees the sparrow fall, and whose love is boundless as His power is supreme."

Two of the Gypsies carried the little body away, and one who seemed an authority among the band intimated that decent burial would be accorded it in accordance with the tribal custom.

This same fellow, whom his comrades addressed as Jason, now asked Nixey and Smithers, a little sarcastically, if they were satisfied to return to the encampment.

Smithers's response was one of his characteristic grunts, but the detective was more explicit.

"What business had you fellows to interfere with us?" he asked, indignantly. "Did we rob your camp of anything?"

"Now look here, mister," said Jason, a little savagely. "It was at the orders of Mrs. Withers, our queen, that we overpowered you without killing you outright, as I kind of wish we had been at liberty to do. Look here!"

He turned himself around in the moonlight, as a living illustration of the effects of Nixey's Nip.

Half the clothing was torn from his person, his face was bruised, his arms black and blue, and his legs looking as if half-twisted asunder.

Perhaps no one but a thorough going Gypsy could have retained the semblance of humanity after passing through that terrible ordeal, and fully two-thirds of his dozen companions bore evidences of even more violent treatment.

To say that they looked as if they had passed through a thrashing machine but mildly described their generally forlorn and defeated aspect.

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Jason, with a yet worse oath; "that grip of yours is harder than a grizzly bear's hug, that I've heard tell of, but never experienced, but the single-stick play of your crony yonder is only second to it in point of effect."

"It was respect for your queen alone that kept me from using my revolver at the outset," said the detective, with a recollection of his interview with Mrs. Withers, "or you wouldn't have got off as easily as you did."

The prisoners were now bundled unceremoniously into their own wagon, and a start was made back to the encampment, Jason leading the horse, and his comrades limping along in the rear.

Before leaving the railroad far behind, there was borne to the party a sound of woman's wailing.

"What is that?" asked Nixey, looking up from the bottom of his wagon.

Jason laughed.

"Didn't you see the great dog killed?" said he.

"Yes."

"Well, that's his mistress—a young lady as looks like a Romany maid herself—takin' on over the brute's death, like one of her own kith an' kin. That's all."

"Do you know if the fugitives back yonder—the boy and girl—were retaken?"

"Young man, ask no questions, an' you'll be told no lies."

On getting back to the camp, the prisoners were thrown, bound as they were, in a ragged little tent, and left to shift for themselves.

In half an hour, however, while they were deliberating over the possibility of freeing themselves from their bonds, which were causing them great pain, they were visited by a young woman bearing a torch.

Nixey at once recognized her as the handsome Gypsy girl, Meeta.

"I am commanded to say," said she, with a roguish sparkle of her black eyes, "that you shall be unbound if you promise not to attempt an escape from the camp."

Smithers remained silent, though hoping that the proposition would be accepted by his superior.

"Who sent you?" asked Nixey.

"Mrs. Withers."

The detective reflected, and then said: "No; we decline her majesty's kindness on such conditions."

Smithers groaned.

The girl hesitated.

Then, much to the prisoner's surprise, she

whipped out a small dagger from amid the shining coils of her raven hair, and set about severing their bonds with rapid strokes.

"I can't see you suffer," said she, with a kindly look in her face and eyes. "I do this on my own responsibility. If you're mean enough to get me into trouble by cutting and running, I have but myself to blame."

She stuck the torch in the ground, and disappeared, before so much as a "Thank you" could be framed in gratitude.

The prisoners lost no time in stretching their cramped bodies, after which they availed themselves of some water in a corner of the tent to perform their ablutions.

"What next, sir?" said Smithers, at last. "Shall we skip?"

"By no means," said the detective, throwing himself on some straw for a night's rest.

"Where should we skip to at present?"

"Aha! you won't take advantage of the girl's weakness for our sufferin's."

"She had no weakness, but was merely obeying her superior's orders."

"You think so?"

"I feel sure of it. The Gypsy queen has business with us—or, rather, with me—before we separate from her, and we might as well see what it is."

"Oho!"

Then Smithers imitated his example, and was soon fast asleep.

Through renewed anxiety over Angela's fate, together with saddening reflections upon the death of Waxy, and other disturbing thoughts, the detective had more difficulty than his companion in composing himself to slumber.

But it came upon him at last, and he slept soundly.

Short, however, were the hours of unbroken rest vouchsafed him.

Toward daybreak a soft touch on the arm aroused the detective.

Bending at his side was a graceful form, which he recognized in the dim light as Elmer's.

"Follow me, sir," whispered the boy.

Nixey cordially pressed that faithful hand, but remained in the sitting posture to which he had risen.

"My brave Elmer!" he murmured; "Faithful heart! where is Angela?"

"Once more in captivity."

"Is another attempt at rescue feasible now?"

"No, sir."

"Then I cannot go with you."

"You cannot?"

"No."

And in a cautious tone, Nixey gave an outline of his strange interview with Mrs. Withers, together with a sketch of the present situation.

Elmer was apparently much agitated at what he heard, especially with regard to the Gypsy queen's connection with the detective's early history, and the condition under which she had promised to reveal his mother's name.

"Come with me, sir," he repeated. "I ask it only that we may confer together more freely than here."

Nixey followed him at once, and they presently found themselves in a secluded dingle at some distance from the encampment.

The detective's first use of his freedom was to clasp the boy to his heart.

"I saw it all—your cool fight against odds—your destruction of the bloodhound—and all for my dear love Angela's sake!" he exclaimed.

"Elmer, you are a simple hero! You would make a far better detective than I. My friend, I am proud of you!"

To his astonishment, Elmer struggled impatiently, and did not rest till freed of his embracement.

"I did nothing for Angela's sake, but only for yours!" cried the boy, panting. "You are the one I love—that I would fight and even die for!"

Scarcely understanding all this, the detective none the less accepted it with becoming gratitude, and then hurriedly narrated, in fuller detail, his adventures since separating from the youth.

In return, though with somewhat more reservation, Elmer related how he had followed Angela without detection to her new prison, and how the last attempt at escape had been frustrated.

"Then you continue in communication with Janet?" asked Nixey.

"Yes."

"But I don't understand how she manages to retain the Goldheims' confidence all this time."

"Janet is a good actress. Sophie Goldheim believes that she hates Angela with a deadliness even exceeding her own. Then, after each attempt at rescue, Janet manages to be found bound hand and foot, the result of my special prowess, and is speedily reinstated in her place as the girl's chief jailer. However, the failure of another attempt may hopelessly compromise her relations with the Goldheims at last."

"All of which goes to show," said the detective, with a smile, "that the redoubtable Sophie probably hates you as much as me."

"Far more—at all events for the present."

"What do you mean?"

Elmer looked at him with a curious smile on his pale face.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PRICE FOR A SECRET.

"CAN you not guess my meaning sir—that is, what is in store for you?" said the boy, after a long pause.

"With regard to that handsome she-devil, Sophie Goldheim, you mean?"

"Yes."

"No; I guess nothing."

"You do not?"

"I protest that I know not what you mean!"

Elmer turned away his face, with an impatient gesture.

"I forgot that you were a man—and therefore stupid in such matters," said he, bitterly.

Nixey was mystified.

"What the deuce are you driving at?" he exclaimed. "Of course, I am a man, as you are, too, or will be in the course of a few years, if I am not very much mistaken."

A confused flush sprang into the boy's pale face.

"Yes, yes; to be sure! What am I thinking of?" said he, struggling out of his embarrassment. "Come now, my dear master, let us to business."

"With all my heart!"

"Your next interview with the old Gypsy queen is probably near at hand."

"I think so."

"After its conclusion, what do you propose to do?"

"Why, devise another plan for Angela's release, as a matter of course!"

"No matter what may be the result—the revelations—of that interview?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, you must devise it before the lapse of another day."

"Why so?"

"Because to-morrow they will flit yet again with their captive."

"Whither?"

"Janet is uncertain as yet."

"But has she no notion?"

"Yes; she thinks it will be New York."

"I can't understand their dancing from pillar to post in this will-o'-the-wisp way. One would think it would tire them out."

"They hope to tire you out first. For of course they dare not venture upon extreme measures with the girl while you are so constantly on their track."

"True; but then New York! In the midst of the Metropolitan police!"

"No place for hiding like a great city, they say."

"True again; it is like a few individual straws in a whole stack of them."

"And Anarchist cranks may be found there by the sheaf."

"Yes, yes; but when will the move be made? What more does Janet know?"

"Nothing as yet."

"Will she communicate with me again through you?"

"Yes. Good-by, now, sir."

"Why cannot you remain with me, Elmer?"

"It would not do, sir—not yet."

"Does it do better for you to lurk continually, like a fox in the brush, on your own account?"

"Janet—"

"But you are my man, not Janet's."

"My master, Janet knows. She is sure that I can best serve you and—Angela as it is."

"She is doubtless right; but the extra danger you encounter when separated from me!"

"Danger! Have I shown that I fear it in your cause?"

"That you have not, my boy! You are a paragon of prodigies!"

"And the separation from you, do—do you think I do not feel it?"

The boy drooped, his color coming and going like a girl's.

"Ah, you must do so! I do believe you love me, boy."

"Believe!"

"Nay, I know it, then. But Sophie's hatred of you especially; it must be little short of fiendish since you have slain the bloodhound Czar."

"It is fiendish."

"Goldheim minions will track you to your death."

"Not sooner than they will you to yours. These Gypsies are in their interest, also."

"Do I not know it? In one way or another way, they may be the death of you. Good God! in such event—"

Nixey paused in a sort of moral consternation.

Elmer's possible sacrifice of his own life in this giddy game had never occurred to him before, or at least in such an appalling light.

The boy was now leaning forward with painful eagerness.

"Go on, sir!" he faltered. "Would my death, then, touch you so nearly—grieve you so deeply?"

"Touch me! grieve me! My lad, I think it would kill me!"

The detective again clasped the youth in his arms, the latter submitting to and even returning the caress for the moment in a sort of ecstasy.

"Your death would almost be my own!" continued the detective, looking long and earnestly into the pale boyish face. "Next to parting forever with Angela herself, I think—"

"Good-by! adieu! I had forgotten Angela! Farewell!"

The interrupting words burst from Elmer like so many sobs.

The next instant he had torn himself from the astonished detective's embrace, and disappeared.

It was by this time nearly broad day.

Nixey returned to the tent unperceived, and notwithstanding his tumult of strange reflections, at last resumed the thread of his broken rest.

"Don't you chaps ever eat any breakfast?" demanded a voice some hours later. "Get out of this!"

It was the Gypsy Jason's voice, and, as Nixey and Smithers struggled to their feet, he was looking in at them, his black eyes sparkling, his hair in wet elf-locks about his swarthy face from their morning dip in the running brook.

"The Oyster Bay stable-man is here for that hired outfit of yours," said Jason, on the way to breakfast. "Is it your wish to let it go?"

"Certainly," said Nixey. "It is paid for, and should have been returned before this."

The Gypsy gave him a significant look.

"It might be faked, and none the wiser," said he, lowering his voice. "We may break camp here at any hour."

"I'm not stealing horses just now," was the stern reply.

Jason laughed.

"No, but you're trading 'em like the devil on occasions!" he sneered, as he turned away.

The detective vouchsafed no reply, since it would have been useless to attempt his horse-trading character any further.

The breakfast for Nixey and Smithers had been provided by Mrs. Withers's orders, and, besides being an excellent one, was graced with the appearance of Meeta, looking very attractive in her plaid basque and scarlet kirtle, as a sort of wildwood Hebe of the Silvan repast.

In spite of his ravenous appetite, Smithers was so much taken with her beauty as to but half-satisfy the former, though she ungratefully devoted her ministrations almost exclusively to his companion, to the no small amusement of the latter.

"You're to be presented to Mistress Withers when she chooses," said Meeta, addressing Nixey at the close of the repast. "In the mean time, I'm to show you something."

The encampment was by this time almost deserted, the Gypsies having vanished mysteriously, young and old, like foxes on the forage.

She led them to a secluded dingle, where, hard by the brawling brook, there was a newly-heaped little mound, freshly strewn with wild flowers.

"It is the little boy's grave," said the Gypsy maiden, simply.

The two men stood by it some moments in silence.

"Who placed the pretty flowers on it?" Nixey presently asked.

"The children of our Romany crew. The boy was a wanderer, eh?"

"Without home or name, so far as we knew."

"Ah, then it was well."

And without another word she led the way back.

Religious rites might not have been said over the tramp-waif's grave, but both men seemed to feel that what had been done was very just and appropriate.

An unmarked grave in God's Silvan Solitude, strewn with transient wild flowers, and all at the hands of those mysterious nomads of mankind, the Gypsies! What more fitting as the obsequies of the child-life that had, perhaps, germinated in vice, blossomed in ignominy, and passed like a breath into the eternal obscurity, but deathless rejuvenescence, of Nature's sheltering arms?

Returning to the camp, the girl, after quitting the men for a moment, came to conduct Nixey once more to Mrs. Withers's august presence.

This time the Gypsy queen received him, not in her van, but in the largest tent of which the encampment could boast.

It was fitted up with a lot of tawdry finery that might have put the visitor in mind of a theatrical property-room during a "Rosedale" performance.

Mrs. Withers received her guest with less dignity, however, and more urbanity than on the preceding day.

"Be seated, young man," said she, when Meeta had been dismissed. "You see I am not offended at your escapade of last night."

"You're extremely kind," said Nixey, with some irony. "I feared I might have incurred your majesty's everlasting displeasure."

"No sarcasm with me, young man! It will be wasted. Of course, I divined your intention last night."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Wasn't I magnanimous in only baffling your intention, without worse treatment?"

"I think you were."

"You don't seem very grateful for it."

"Mistress Withers, let us speak plainly," said the detective. "You can't be such a fool as to expect any special consideration from one whom you acknowledge to have stolen from his mother when a helpless infant."

"Perhaps not, but you are still in my power, young man."

"That remains to be seen."

"True; and now that we're alone—"

"Which we are not."

Mrs. Withers looked around her with well-assumed surprise.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply, that we are not alone."

"Do you see a third person."

"No, but I feel one, and my impressions are seldom at fault."

"Ah, indeed."

"And I just saw yonder strip of tapestry tremble, while our breaths form the only air astir."

"Young man, you are pretty sharp," said the Gypsy sovereign, slightly disconcerted.

It had suddenly flashed upon Nixey—why, he could scarcely say—that the Gypsy maiden, Meeta, might be the person that Mrs. Withers required him to marry, in fulfillment of the condition by which she was to reveal to him the secret of his parentage, and he was impatient to put an end to what he regarded as a cruel, if not ridiculous farce.

"I try to be wide-awake on occasion, madam," said he, politely. "Suppose we proceed to business."

"As you will."

She gave a signal.

The tapestry parted, and the young woman it had concealed stood revealed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE HAZARD OF THE DIE."

THE detective started back in mingled astonishment, fury and disgust.

It was not Meeta, but one yet more attractive, more darkly beautiful than she, that was thus revealed to him.

It was Sophie Goldheim.

But she looked so lovely, so penitent, so fascinating, that for an instant the young man's instinctive resentment and loathing at the unexpectedness of the vision were held in abeyance.

Dressed in pure white, with a pink rose at her belt, a scarlet one at her throat, and roses of the richest, deepest crimson in her raven hair, her superbly robust yet statuesque proportions were set off to the most charming advantage, while her attitude was unstudiedly sweet and graceful.

If her dark beauty was rather that of the fallen angels than of the seraphim, never before had she seemed so wistfully, so pleadingly girlish and innocent.

But the spell of her witchery was dissipated almost as soon as formed in the present instance.

The young detective made a repellent gesture, which, if modified by his instinctive consideration for the gentler sex at large, was none the less significant.

"What is this mummerly?" he exclaimed, turning angrily upon the Gypsy woman. "Is this the ravishing surprise you thought to have in store for me?"

Mrs. Withers made no effort to conceal her disappointment, while Sophie's countenance underwent many distressing changes.

"It is no mummerly!" said the former, abruptly. "Young man, this young lady is as charming as the most fastidious of men should desire; and, moreover, she—"

Sophie filled in the pause by throwing herself at his feet.

"She loves you!" she cried, in a sort of agony of passion and hopelessness. "Oh, to distraction, to despair!"

He did not spurn her—she was still a woman, for all her wickedness—but he recoiled with a loathing look that was just as unmistakable.

Sophie retreated to a seat, and covered her burning face with her hands.

"Speak, and have an end!" said Nixey, turning sternly once more to Mrs. Withers. "Is this the girl you would have me pledge my hand to, in return for the name and identity of the wronged mother from whose breast you stole me in my helpless infancy?"

"Yes."

"Unprincipled as you are, can you know what you demand?"

"No disrespect to me, young man! I am the queen of my tribe, sir—"

He silenced her with a contemptuous gesture.

"Oh, no! no disrespect, only veneration, gratitude and high honor, for such as you, as a matter of course!" he exclaimed, with seething sarcasm. "Speak, I say; do you know the wickedness, even the crimes, of this beautiful devil with whom you would have me link my fate, as the price of your cowardly secret?"

The Gypsy's face was assuming a dangerous look, but she did not reply to him at once.

"Answer me, I say!"

"Don't forget yourself, young man!"

"Do not you, then, undertake to trifle with me."

"I never trifle."

"Answer my question, then."

"Miss Goldheim has told me all. Whatever she has done and dared has been prompted solely by her love for you."

"By that, and that only," came in sobs from the hidden lips.

The detective burst into a discordant laugh.

"I ought to feel flattered, I am sure. But, fortunately, I am not molded in that way. Woman, are you beside yourself?"

"Not at all, young man," said Mrs. Withers, her black eyes beginning to snap. "Be careful, I tell you!"

Another contemptuous gesture.

"That girl and her father have ceaselessly plotted against my life! Even now they hold in captivity a young girl, Angela Braunfels, the idol of my heart—an heiress, whose death or elimination they seek to accomplish, that this young woman, this beauty, this angelic creature, may successfully counterfeit their victim's personality and inherit her millions."

"No, no, no!" And Sophie sobbed afresh.

"Millions, eh?" and there was an only sneer in the Gypsy woman's voice. "Ah, but when are not millions a temptation? No wonder the little prisoner is the idol of your heart, young man."

Had she been a man he would have struck her to the earth.

As it was he wheeled upon her in a white wrath that was speechless for the time being.

"Be easy, young man. The millions you shall not miss. They shall still be yours—with her!"

She pointed to Sophie, who had now looked up, her tear-stained face yet lovelier for the phantom hope that haunted its soft lineaments.

"Angela shall be free," she cried, eagerly. "Say but the word."

"The word!" He burst again into his derisive laugh. "Ay, the word that pledges me to you!"

"Yes, yes!"

He recoiled again.

"Never! Good God! has it come to this?"

"Yes, young man; and I am tired of it as you!" cried Mrs. Withers, bridling up. "You have the alternative before you; decide at once."

The alternative!

For the first time it struck upon the young detective's heart with all its deadly significance.

"Woman, you cannot mean it!" he faltered. "Is this the price you insist on for my mother's restoration to these longing arms?"

"It is."

"I can scarcely believe it."

"Plain enough, young man. No pledge, no mother. There you are."

He turned to Sophie.

"And you," he murmured. "You have at least the semblance of womanhood, with all its lovely attributes—tenderness, pity, modesty. Yet you would insist on such an alternative, at the cost of two hearts that beat but for each other!"

Her head was bent, and she was trembling violently, but not a sound escaped her save the tumultuous movement of her breast, which was eloquent enough.

"She has nothing to do with the bargaining," interposed the Gypsy, sharply. "That is my affair."

"I begin to understand."

"Decide, then. No pledge, no mother. I shan't say it again. Your answer!"

The detective had grown very pale, but also calm.

Mechanically, as was his wont in extreme cases, he stretched forth his powerful hand, opening and shutting it slowly.

"Ay, ay!" urged the Gypsy queen; "it is a famous grip, as I have heard from my young men and others. Shall it grasp at the air, young man? Or shall it clutch this beautiful young lady as a bride, a princely fortune as her dower, and a vanished mother back from the abyss of the unknown, and all at one swoop? Speak!"

His contemptuous laugh rung out for the last time, and his grand gesture of dissent was so decisive as to need no verbal negative to support it.

Mrs. Withers set her teeth.

"You're a fool, young man! Henceforth you're as nameless and parentless as in the past. I have no more use for you."

But Sophie's eyes had been fastened upon the detective in an agony of suspense.

At that final gesture, a stifled shriek burst from her lips.

She had, like Richard III, staked her emotional all upon this melo-dramatic test, and she must stand "the hazard of the die."

But did not a last, a forlorn, appeal remain to her?

She once more threw herself at the detective's feet.

She seized his hand, covering it with kisses, in spite of his resistance—in spite of the unwomanliness, the shame of it.

"Oh, do not make me bate you to the end," she cried, "when I would love you so much—so much! Do not spurn me, when my passion, my life, my devotion are at your feet!"

More had she raved, notwithstanding his distaste, but for an interruption wholly unexpected.

The whole side of the tent next where Sophie had first stood revealed was ripped asunder, as by a cyclone, and a formidable eavesdropper—Harnst Mandel—burst in upon the scene in a whirlwind of wrath and fury.

"Witch! traitress! sorceress!" he roared, springing toward Sophie with bristling hair and beard, "is it thus you plead for love to one that scorns you, after feeding me on occasion with your honeyed lies?"

The really frightened girl was still in her suppliant attitude.

"Up with you!" yelled the Great Bear, "or I'll trample you!"

He actually made a motion with his foot, when Nixey interposed.

"You will offer no violence here!" said he, sternly.

Then the giant turned on him with a sort of enthusiasm of wrath.

"You're my man, anyway!" he howled. "Have at you!"

"With all my heart!" was the collected reply.

Then, as Sophie disappeared with a scream, and the Gypsy queen vociferated in vain for a cessation of hostilities in her royal presence, the two men came together with a terrific shock.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THAT NIP AGAIN."

THE next minute the tent came down with a rush, enveloping the shrieking representative of Zingari majesty amid its canvas ruins.

But the contestants went through the rents without quitting their feet, and then, but only for a few seconds, there was such a fight as was dear to the pugilistic Gypsy young men, who came trooping in from every direction.

It was like a grizzly bear and a man of steel locked together in a seemingly unequal struggle, which, however, could have but one conclusion.

"Crash! crash! crash! fell, reached out, thrust, shot and battered the trained blows of the lither and more agile combatant, every one of them reaching its mark on the face or body of the burly giant, whose ponderous lungs and windmill efforts in return seemed to have no more effect than if expended on an oak-tree stem.

Then came the *coup de grace*.

The Colossus suddenly threw up his arms, and gave vent to a bellowing roar that might have exploded from the aching corporosity of the paternal figure in the Laocoon in the final spasm of the fabulous monster's constructive coil.

The mass of flesh and muscle under his right shoulder-blade was bunched and gathered in the jackscrew clutch that, like the bulldog's on the bovine muzzle, knew not how to let go, save at the master-bidding or in the throes of death itself.

In fewer words, the Great Bear was experiencing, to its full capacity and most artistic flavor, the notorious Nixey's Nip, and didn't like it a cent's worth.

He could only wriggle, writhe, palpitate and howl, while the Gypsies fairly danced a silvan cancan around him and his remorseless antagonist in a delirious ecstasy of savage delight.

Even Mrs. Withers, freshly released from her collapsed tent, smoothed her ruffled dignity to gaze upon the extraordinary show with undisguised curiosity, if not altogether with royal approval.

At length Nixey deigned to relax his terrible grip.

The giant darted off into the forest, with a farewell howl.

The detective coolly followed as far as the brook's brink, for the purpose of washing his hands.

As he stooped to the running water, momentarily left to himself, a pair of familiar eyes glanced out at him from a near covert.

They were Elmer's.

"Hist!" said the boy. "I saw it all."

Whether he meant only the tussle with the Great Bear, or also the interview that had preceded it, he did not say, though Nixey inferred the former.

"What now?" said the detective.

"Make yourself scarce, and cover your tracks well. In that case, a return to New York will be made by the early morning train to-morrow. It is a milk train. It is due at F—at half-past four."

Nixey had only time to nod in acquiescence when the lurking eyes disappeared.

There was a mere rustle in the covert, like that of a wandering wind, but he felt that the boy had glided far away.

Returning to the encampment, a ringing cheer from the assembled Gypsy men was his salute.

In their eyes he was a greater hero than "he who taketh a city."

They crowded around him, curiously eying his physical points, while one or two, less timid than the rest, ventured to run the pressure of an investigating hand over his biceps.

Nixey felt very much like a show horse, or prize ox, under the process, but he underwent it good-naturedly and with becoming modesty.

But Smithers was also there, a proud grin on his weather-beaten face, and he was one of an interesting group.

Barring his own personality, it was composed of Mrs. Withers, now looking severely discontented, the pretty girl Meeta, as fresh and smiling as an old-world oread newly risen from her dewdrop bath, the young Gypsy chief Jason, and an undersized but enormously broad-shouldered Gypsy of more than middle age, who, when he moved, Nixey perceived to be lame.

"Young man," said Jason, advancing with much politeness, "Mistress Withers would like another test of your hand-grip."

Nixey glanced at the sovereign dame, but could see no signs of relenting, so far as the revelation precious to his heart was concerned, in her cast-iron visage.

"She will have to excuse me," said he, coldly. "I am not exhibiting myself nowadays, even for the pleasure of royalty."

He beckoned to Smithers, and was preparing to go, when Jason again interposed.

"But hold on, comrade," said Jason, urbanely. "Here is our smithy, Vulcan Crackbone, whom you have not yet seen. Do Mrs. Withers the honor of looking him over."

Nixey did so with a calmly critical eye, for the Gypsy blacksmith just then shambled forward, as if to invite inspection.

He was well-named Vulcan, being a very creditable paraphrase of the Olympian sledge-wielder.

Though undersized in point of stature, he was of prodigious proportions, his hairy bared arms looking as if they might uproot a ten-year-old ash sapling with a single twist, and his flat-footed, half-stooping attitude resembled the allegorical Atlas supporting the world.

He was, moreover, typically hideous, and in each hand he carried a stout, newly-fashioned horseshoe.

"Mrs. Withers begs, sir," continued Jason, smilingly, "that you will essay a hand-grip with our Mr. Vulcan Crackbone."

Nixey merely looked tired, and again beckoned his subordinate apart.

Her majesty frowned, and made a sign to Meeta.

"Then let me beseech you, sir, to the trial," said the latter, with her prettiest smile. "The smith is my father, young man, and, moreover, our queen, Mrs. Withers, is my grandmother."

"No one would suspect the relationship without the telling, miss," was the left-handed compliment of our detective's reply. "But I shall have to disoblige you in this little tournament that you all seem to set your hearts on."

Then noticing a specially disappointed look in the royal dame's face, he added, pointedly:

"Every man's strength, as every woman's power, is a secret till tried. One secret for another is but a fair bargain everywhere."

"I understand you, young man," said Mrs. Withers, "and I will meet you half-way. That is only fair. That will be my address for one month after the present week, should you wish to confer with me again."

She gave Meeta a card, which was handed ceremoniously to Nixey.

It was a well-known New York fortune-teller's Seventh avenue address.

"Half a loaf's better than no bread," observed the detective, a little sententiously, and, pocketing the card with a bow, he turned courteously to the Romany blacksmith. "Mr. Vulcan Crackbone," he suavely added, "how are you feeling to-day?"

With a champion grunt that would have discounted a big Indian chief's at a council fire, the lame Colossus took one of the horseshoes between his ponderous leg-of-mutton hands, and, with a great wrench, twisted it altogether out of shape.

"A good feat!" said Nixey, approvingly.

"Allow me, sir."

He daintily took the other horseshoe in his white and apparently delicate left hand.

Placing the sides between his palm and fingertips, he suddenly closed his hand, and the horseshoe was as suddenly shut together and overlapped, like a pair of tailor's shears, or a cross-beak's bill.

There was a sensation.

The Gypsy young men cheered again, Meeta smiled, her majesty frowned portentously, and Vulcan looked as if you could have knocked him down with a mousetrap, though he speedily rallied.

"But, really, that is a mere trifle," said the detective, lightly.

"A trifle, is it?" roared the Brobdingnag. "Then put it there!"

And he invitingly thrust out the open palm of a massive right hand that resembled a spread-eagle quartz-crusher in a Rocky Mountain gold-mine.

Nixey smilingly dropped his right hand into the yawning receptacle.

It looked almost like a lily-white woman's hand by contrast, or perhaps like a butterfly in a shark's mouth.

But the members suddenly closed on each other with the rapidity of thought, and the

seeming disparity was as a phantom of the past, a dead theology, a heathen myth.

The younger man's coat-sleeve merely filled to bursting with the play of the muscles underneath, and there was a quiver through the shapely wrist, like the quiver of concentrated forked-lightning through a sheaf of steel rods, but hardly another sign of the enormous pressure that was being put forth.

But at the same time there was a crunching sound, like the crunch of bunched stereotypes in the jaws of a disarranged Gordon Alligator printing-press, and the owner of the ham-like flipper went up in the air, with a combination snort, screech and howl, which forcibly suggested Longfellow's "terrible tempest shock of Ragnarock in the Day of Doom."

And that was all.

The next instant saw the released Mr. Crackbone trumpeting and dancing around, like an elephant in a panic, or an old-time mammoth of the North freshly jumped out of the ship-splintering jaws of a Baffin's Bay ice-nip.

"Satisfied?" queried the detective, politely. "Or would you like a fresh trial, sir?"

But the Gypsy forge-master had only too evidently had enough to last him for a generation, and Nixey and his friend walked out of the camp without further molestation.

"What is the next move, sir?" respectfully asked Smithers when they had proceeded for some moments in silence.

Nixey roused himself out of one of his fits of despondency.

With Angela still in the hands of the enemy, and his newly unfolded hopes of finding his mother apparently crushed in the bud forever, he seemed further from the shining goal of his ambition than ever before.

"Let me collect my thoughts," said he. "We're to take the early-morning milk-train at F—, and in the mean time must manage to efface ourselves if possible."

They were walking on the line of the railroad. Presently Smithers looked back over his shoulder, and, with some hesitation of manner begged that a temporary halt might be made.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NIXEY AND SMITHERS.

NIXEY had also looked back, and caught a glimpse of a somewhat familiar red kirtle disappearing in the woods at the side of the track.

He acquiesced in the request, and Smithers also disappeared.

He returned in ten minutes, looking disconcerted but happy, and the march was resumed.

"By the way, sir," said Smithers, after another long pause. "I might be of service, if you'd take me along to New York with you."

"I have had no intention of dismissing you, my faithful fellow," said the detective. "But what do you mean in particular?"

"There's a certain gal, sir—"

"Ah!"

Smithers cleared his throat.

"A certain gal, sir," he went on, "as often accompanies a certain grandmother of hers on certain fortune-tellin' trips to New York. Not as I take any stock in fortune-tellin', sir—"

"Of course not!"

And Nixey tore his melancholy to rags and tatters with a hearty laugh.

"Let me help you out," said he. "You've made an impression on the handsome and roguish Meeta. She is her queenly grandmother's companion everywhere, and you think to possibly facilitate my future plans through her instrumentality."

"That's about the size of it, sir."

"Then let me congratulate you," and the detective shook him cordially by the hand. "But, unless you're sure the girl loves you, I would also bid you beware."

Smithers was a rugged old coaster, bronzed and seamed by hardships, who would never have been taken for a lady's man, but he was beaming all over just now.

"Thank'ee, sir," said he. "I'm dead sure the beautiful creature loves me, though she's honest enough to admit as how it's all on account of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, sir. That is, she only wants to marry me because of my humble connection with such a man as you are. It's jest as if you was the sun, sir, an' I was the moon. Only a sort of horrified light, of course. But then where's the gal, an' especially the Gypsy gal, as isn't dead gone on the moonlight? See?"

Nixey laughed again, and after once more enjoining his companion to go slow in his love affair, imparted to him the latest piece of information from Elmer.

"We must not only keep dark in the interim," he continued, "but also manage to board the milk-train in some unlooked-for way, and beyond the possibility of being recognized."

"I understand," said Smithers, reflectively. "Now, if we could only pass for dairymen ourselves, I think we could manage it."

"The same thought has occurred to me," said the detective.

Their desired opportunity chanced to be near at hand.

Within a mile or two of F—, they sighted a

large old-fashioned dairy farm, in whose barnyard the farmer was at work, with a single assistant, who seemed stupid or lazy.

They were mending the inclosure, and from the way the farmer was swearing at his companion it was evident that there was dissatisfaction in the air.

Nixey and Smithers approached the spot, receiving a surly nod and suspicious stare as the proprietor's only recognition of their presence.

It chanced that both Nixey and Smithers had some rough knowledge of carpentry.

So the former forthwith made the proposition to finish off the inclosure by nightfall for board and lodging for the pair until the following morning.

The farmer was an avaricious German-American, who was at once taken with the latter part of the proposition.

"You don't look like mechanics, either of you," said he.

"Try us," said Nixey, throwing off his coat, while Smithers followed his example.

"Go ahead, then. With this numskull, I'll surely never get the job done for to-night's milking. If you do it well, you're welcome to the best fare my house affords."

So the two wayfarers set to work with a will, while the stupid farm hand was relegated to the more appropriate, if less congenial task of much shoveling in an adjoining field.

In less than an hour they were making satisfactory progress, and by dinner-time the farmer was very friendly.

"We are anxious to reach Hunter's Point by the early train," said Nixey, during the discussion of the meal. "Could you let us drive into F— with the milk cans, and then give us an introduction to the conductor, or a brakeman, that would see us through?"

Before this he had told a plausible yarn, as to the presence of himself and companion in the unfamiliar neighborhood without friends or money, and it had apparently been accepted.

"They're mighty particular on the railroad, but I'll tell you what I'll do for you," said the farmer, after a thoughtful pause. "I was intending to go into town with my man, along with the milk, to-morrow, to see about a pair of work horses for sale there at the Point. My wife and daughter could see about the cows during our half-day's absence. Still, it would cause me inconvenience, as I can ill-afford to spare the time away from the farm work."

"My friend and I are the men for you," said Nixey, promptly. "We'll be your agents for the occasion."

The farmer's eyes sparkled.

"But I don't know if I can trust you," said he.

"Oho! Is there any money to be handled?"

"No, no; of course not. You would only have to look the animals over, and send back word through the post-office as to their value, condition, and so on."

"What's the matter with our undertaking that for you?"

"Why, it isn't likely that you're much of a judge of horseflesh."

A compliment that had been paid to him by Mrs. Withers, or what she had intended as such, recurred to the detective:

"Is a Gypsy generally considered a judge of horses, or not?" he asked.

"I should say so! but then— Hallo! why didn't I think of it before? Be you a Gypsy now, mister?"

Nixey smiled, and spoke some gibberish to Smithers, who, taking the cue, responded in kind.

The farmer slapped his thigh, his hired man grinned from ear to ear, and the farmwife and her buxom daughter looked wide-eyed, as if suddenly concerned with regard to the henroosts.

So it was arranged that Nixey and Smithers were to accompany the farmer's milk cans as his agents in the horse trade.

In the course of the afternoon they completed the fence-building in a workmanlike manner that still further increased the old fellow's satisfaction.

And long before daylight on the following morning they were being driven toward F— by Hans, the farm-hand, along with the milk, and with just enough of the farmer's money to pay their fare to Hunter's Point, besides directions for finding the work-horses.

In the mean time they kept a close watch on Hans.

He was a Hungarian, whom the farmer had confessed to have only engaged on the preceding day, without recommendations, and Nixey, ever on the alert for spies, had not been long in coming to the conclusion that the fellow's taciturnity and stupidity were assumed.

But this observation he had been careful to share only with Smithers, and they were consequently on the lookout.

It soon became equally evident that Hans was no less warily watching them.

Suddenly, at a lonely part of the road, the fellow, who had scarcely uttered a syllable during the drive, raised a small whistle to his lips, and blew a low but penetrating blast.

"What is that for?" demanded Nixey, with an affectation of unconcern.

The man laughed, and replied in broken English, that it was to communicate with a fellow countryman of his, at work on a neighboring farm, and with whom he was desirous of having a little familiar chat.

The detective also laughed, but secretly signaled Smithers to be ready for action.

At the same instant the man who had been whistled for made his appearance in the road.

Hans stopped the horses, and at once began an animated conversation with him in a foreign tongue.

Nixey quietly waited till he considered his suspicions pretty well confirmed.

He then precipitated himself on Hans, as being the more powerful of the foreigners.

Smithers, leaping from the wagon, did the like with the other.

In a few minutes they had them securely bound with some ropes that were fortunately found in the wagon.

The Hungarians had fought, struggled and cursed at a great rate, but without avail.

They were then coolly investigated by aid of the wagon lantern.

Both were beetle-browed, sinister-looking men, wearing slouch hats, coarse blouses and blue overalls, much like the *bona fide* soil-tillers of their native Hungary, and the new-comer could speak no English.

But the treacherous Hans was sufficiently familiar with the language for the emergency.

"Confess that you two are spies in Mr. Goldheim's secret employ!" said the detective, sternly.

Hans sullenly replied that he did not understand.

"Perhaps this will assist you," said Nixey, and he clapped a revolver to the rascal's ear. "Now are your ideas any clearer?"

They were, indeed.

Hans, who was a constitutional coward, submitted at discretion, and made a full confession on the spot.

Both he and his companion, whose name was Yawcoop, as he pronounced it, were Anarchist laborers in Goldheim's service.

At his command, they had hired out to farmers in the vicinity of Goldheim's new retreat on the preceding day, for the express purpose of spying and reporting upon the movements of the detective and his companion, in case of an emergency.

They were expected to report to their master on that very morning, when the train should arrive at F—, and also to accompany him and his party to New York, as an addition to the Goldheim body-guard.

Spies of the same sort had been carefully installed among the various farms of the neighborhood days in advance of the change of base from the north to the south shore of the Sound.

Such were the extraordinary precautions that had been taken by the arch-conspirator to secure his dove-like victim and baffle her lion-hearted lover.

A peculiar sign, which Hans communicated, was to give the Goldheims intimation that the coast was clear, while another would indicate the reverse.

"Good enough!" grimly ejaculated the detective, when he had mastered these important points. "Bear a hand, Smithers!"

But few instructions were necessary now.

In a few minutes, the Hungarians were left, gagged and bound, in the roadside bushes, and their conquerors were proceeding in the wagon, with the characteristic coarse blouses, wide overalls and slouched hats transferred to their own persons.

"It's a long game and a deep one in which two or three cannot take a hand," said Nixey. "Hump her along, Smithers! for this time, I trust, we have the inside track of the Goldheims."

Smithers, who held the lines, whipped up the team in a way that made the milk cans rattle, and F— was reached a good hour in advance of the anticipated train.

To take a receipt for the milk, write and post to the farmer an explanatory letter, inclosing not only the milk-receipt but also the money he had paid for the two fares to Hunter's Point, was but the work of a short time.

Then the two disguised men, having put up the horses at a neighboring stable, waited patiently on the dark and deserted station platform.

F— was an insignificant village, whose railroad station was merely for the convenience of the surrounding farmers and dairymen.

At the first glimmer of dawn, the slow milk-train came thundering along, the single passenger car pausing at the larger platform, while the milk freight was being taken on further back.

Early as was the hour, Mr. Goldheim was anxiously thrusting out his head for a glimpse of his supposed subordinates.

Nixey, who had assumed Hans's outer habiliments, made the prearranged sign indicative that the coast was clear.

The innkeeper seemed to draw a long breath of relief.

He signed the two men to approach nearer, and addressed some words to them in Hungarian.

This was a critical moment.

Nixey, pretending not to hear distinctly, drew the slouched hat closer over his brow, and imitating to perfection the broken English of the fellow he was personating, replied that there was no danger.

It was done so naturally that the chief conspirator fell into the trap, and what he next said was in English.

"But the enemy—the infernal Nixey and his comrade!" said he. "Have you seen nothing of them?"

"Yawcoop saw them at nightfall going off toward the Sound."

"The Sound! 'Tis well. They're off the scent. Find room in the old car ahead. This one's full."

The head was drawn in, and the disguised men had just time to leap into the car indicated as the train moved on.

It was an old Express car into which they had jumped, and which was probably being brought up from somewhere in the interior for repairs.

There were already nearly a dozen men in it, rough, foreign-looking fellows, doubtless in the Goldheim interest, who eyed the new-comers with suspicion, though the latter pretended to pay no attention to them.

"Suppose they penetrate our disguise," whispered Smithers. "What then?"

"Goldheim himself failed to do so," was the detective's reply. "Come back here, and take a look into the passenger car."

They did this by returning to the intervening platform.

Fortunately, the passenger car was so fairly lighted that they could obtain a pretty good view of the interior from this standpoint.

Goldheim, his daughter, Earnst Mandel, Angela and Janet were grouped together at one side.

The rest of the car seemed to be almost packed with the ruffianly Anarchist followers of Goldheim.

Prominent among those in the other car was Powder Billy, together with several others recognized as having figured in the fight at the boat-house.

"They're thicker'n codfish in a school!" whispered Smithers.

"Yes; a strong body-guard," was the reply.

"But wait till the ferry-boat is reached."

"What to do there, sir?"

"We must call on the police and boat-people for support, I fancy. But that will depend."

"I don't see a sign of the boy, Elmer, sir."

"Nor I. More's the pity. We must try to communicate with Janet."

Here the conductor crossed the platform to take their tickets.

"I wish I could have ventured to send word to Janet by him," whispered Nixey, as the official passed into the passenger car. "But the risk was too great."

"That's so, sir, and—"

Smithers was interrupted by Powder Billy and four ruffians, who suddenly sprung out of the express car and pounced upon them.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MILK-TRAIN.

SMITHERS was overthrown by the suddenness of the assault, and only saved himself from being hurled from the train by clutching desperately at the guard-rails.

Nixey, however, though taken no less by surprise, was quicker to recover from it.

"Zip! flew his trained blow from the shoulder-catching his foremost assailant under the chin, and sending him overboard in a flash.

Then, with the rapidity of lightning one "nip" closed upon another ruffian's throat, while the other shut like a bear-trap upon Powder Billy's neck, wrenching him from his crouching position upon the half-prostrate Smithers.

This diversion enabled Smithers to recover himself, and successfully throttle the remaining villain with whom he was engaged.

"Prevent the least outcry, or we are lost!" was the young detective's first injunction.

"All right, sir!" was Smithers's low-voiced reply, as he propped his choking man against the rail. "What next?"

"This!"

And, with either hand, Nixey thrust his brace of victims one after the other headlong off the platform into the darkness.

They disappeared at the side, without the emission of a single cry.

Smithers hesitated.

"It looks almost like murder, sir!" said he.

"Be mine the responsibility, then!"

And Nixey, coolly snatching the victim from Smithers's clutch, shot him off at one side as if fired out of a gun.

"A soft fall, I fancy!" he muttered, as there was something like a splash. "Let us hope that the others dropped as easily."

He had crept to the door of the Express car, and was studying its interior.

Five men remained within.

They were brawny, hang-dog ruffians, with an alert, expectant air about them that was sufficiently suggestive.

"At any minute," whispered Nixey, "they may guess their companions' fate, and give the alarm."

"Yes, sir," said Smithers, who was again at his side. "I'm your man!"

The Express car was provided with sliding doors at the sides, after the manner of a baggage car.

Nixey pointed to one of these, which was wide open.

Smithers nodded intelligently.

The next instant they had bounded into the car, closing the door behind them, and were upon the astounded quintette, like hungry tigers upon a bunch of buck-tailed antelopes at a jungle pool.

But there was this difference, that there was no attendant roar.

Not even a paralyzing snarl—only a sort of gasp, on the part of the thunder-struck victims, as one after another they were bundled up and shot out of the ominous side-opening, like sacks of grain into an elevator flume.

The last one, however, in disappearing, gave utterance to a rasping screech.

Nixey ground his teeth and stamped his foot impatiently.

"A blunder!" he muttered; "but not, let us hope, a fatal one."

And, sinking into a seat, he dragged the breathless Smithers down to his side, pulled his hat still closer over his brows, and waited.

They had their eyes fixed upon the door by which they had entered.

"That yell must have startled some one," said he, in a low voice. "Heaven grant, not the conductor!"

"Why?"

"It would never do to dispose of him in that way. He is not a conspirator. Hush! here is some one. Hal!"

Here the door opened.

Fortunately, it was *not* the conductor who at this moment put in an appearance.

It was Earnst Mandel.

"We're in luck," whispered the detective. "Leave him to me!"

Seemingly much astonished at perceiving only two ruffians in the car, the Great Bear advanced a few steps.

"How is this, you fellows?" he began. "Mr. Goldheim thought he heard an outcry but now, and there were ten of you here, without counting Hans and Yawcoop who last got aboard, while now—"

The detective's lion-grip was on his shoulder, while the astounded Earnst was looking down the mouth of a revolver, clutched in his captor's disengaged hand.

"Utter but a single outcry, Earnst Mandel, and you are a dead man!"

The command was enunciated in a distinctly deadly voice, and yet it was a difficult one to obey to the letter, with whatsoever willingness on the part of the victim.

For, while death stared him in the face from the revolver's muzzle, to enforce the injunction, the bone-crunching grip on his shoulder was prompting him to a howl of anguish, almost uncontrollable.

It was like subjecting a victim to the combined devices of an old time torture-chamber, including racks, iron boots, thumbscrews, red-hot pincers and the like, while politely cautioning him against making a noise.

The Great Bear could only sniff, tremble, turn pale and sweat.

"Let up on your grip, and I'll obey!" he gasped. "Good Lord! do you think I'm made of gutta-percha?"

As Nixey eased up on his grip with a grim smile, Smithers edged around on the other side of the Colossus.

His object was to get a side-purchase upon his immense bulk, to assist in the supposed plan of heaving it out of the car, after the manner of the lesser victims who had gone the same road already.

But Nixey waved him aside.

"You don't understand," said he. "This man we keep as hostage."

In obedience to an imperative gesture, Earnst sunk into a seat, the detective just behind him, and with the revolver pressed against his body.

He was sullen, but wholly subdued.

"You accept the situation?" was hissed into his ear.

"Yes."

"You realize that, come what may, the slightest attempt on your part to betray our identity will make me shoot you like a dog?"

"Yes."

"You do not doubt that I would do it?"

"Doubt, and where you are concerned? Doubt the devil!"

"This is well. Earnst Mandel, on three separate occasions have you individually attempted my life by cowardly assassination."

Mandel groaned.

"I would be perfectly justified in killing you now upon the spot," continued the detective. "I give you your life, however, on condition of your replying with implicit truth to the questions I am about to put to you."

Earnst seemed to be considering, and then drew a long breath.

"I'll do it," said he. "Cut away! I'm wearied of the whole mean business."

"Explain what you mean by that."

"Oh, curse it all! For one thing, I have discovered Sophie's treachery to me, and I wouldn't care for that, if Janet would only smile on me."

"Oho!"

"Yes; and then the Goldheim jig is almost up, anyway. For since the innkeeper got word of Lawyer Sloat's arrival from England in person—"

He came to a pause, looking scared and confused.

"Go on!"

There was a cold deadliness in the command that swept aside the other's hesitation, as an icy wind sweeps the cloud onward.

"Well, he only got word of this a few hours ago."

"From whom?"

"From Crosswise and Shortcut, the New York representatives of the London solicitors."

"To what effect?"

"I didn't read the dispatch."

"You know its import. Speak!"

"Well, they telegraphed in effect that the jig was up—that Sloat's arrival had destroyed the last chance of their standing in with the Goldheim scheme."

"Was that all?"

"I swear it."

"Still, you infer more?"

"Perhaps I do."

"Out with it. What, in Goldheim's opinion, brought Lawyer Sloat so unexpectedly to this country?"

"Goldheim knows all about it now from other sources. Sloat & Johnson were telegraphed for on the morning after we quitted New York with the young lady."

"Telegraphed for?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By the young lady's guardian, Mrs. Traitner."

The detective drew a long breath.

He knew what had happened in a flash.

Mrs. Traitner, with unlooked-for energy, had taken the initiative.

She had telegraphed the particulars of Angela's parentage and present danger on the very morning after his conference with her.

This would have given Mr. Sloat the requisite time, in the event of his catching a steamer on the point of departure, to be in personal communication with her at this juncture.

The whole affair was at once beautifully simplified, could but Angela's rescue be secured.

The detective proceeded with his interrogations.

"Mr. Goldheim must have been disheartened at this intelligence, eh?"

"Completely so."

"Does he not also think this game of his about up?"

"I imagine so."

"What further object, then, can he have in holding on to the girl?"

"In the desperate hope, I think, of making terms for himself and daughter with the victors."

"How?"

"By continuing to keep the heiress in his possession."

"How can he do that?"

Earnst once more hesitated.

"Go on!"

There was an ominous click of the revolver.

"Well, I'll tell all, so far as I can of my own knowledge."

"Be sure you do."

"On the east side of New York, in the vicinity of Tompkins Square, there is an enormous tenement building. Except one suite of upper rooms, it is altogether inhabited by Anarchist loafers and workingmen, for the most part out of employment. They're Bohemians, Hungarians, Italians, Russians, Poles, and the like—well; though some of them are my compatriots, I am not very proud of them."

"I should say not! Proceed."

"All are organized Anarchists, and more or less affiliated with kindred organizations in Chicago and elsewhere. Goldheim is their secret prime leader, as Sophie is their adored high priestess."

"As Count Kotzka and Clarisse Letours were of the Nihilist-Socialist organization of five years ago?"

Earnst started, his coarse face assuming an awe-struck look, as if at the mere mention of those once-dreaded names.

"Yes," he answered, in a low voice. "Much the same, I think, only—"

"Only the Anarchists are so much infinitely worse—utterly without principle—with no purpose but to destroy and, if needs be, to assassinate by the wholesale! Is that what you mean?"

The Great Bear moved uneasily in his seat, but the point of the revolver was making itself felt at the back of his ribs.

"That's about the size of it," he growled.

"Go on with your story."

"Well, Goldheim bosses 'em all, inspires their circulars, secretly edits their newspaper organs,

promotes their demonstrations, collects money from 'em when they've got any, and so on. They're devoted to him. Apart from their natural love of personal luxury, the chief object of the Goldheims in getting possession of the Jekylls millions was to lavish them in fomenting the pet plan of the Anarchists. They're sincere enough in that."

"And that pet plan?"

"An Anarchist upheaval in New York, compared with which the Chicago attempt is but a tempest in a teapot—a revolution that shall not rest till every law-and-order institution of this country is forever overthrown!"

Resolute as he was, the detective was half-aghast, while Smithers was even more profoundly impressed.

"Then," exclaimed Nixey, "the murder of Mattie Braun was instigated by a desire for wealth to be expended to this amazing end—was, in brief, an Anarchist murder?"

"What has that got to do with it?" said Earnst, with a start. "I don't see the connection."

"Yes, you do; or, I'll make it plainer. If the removal of Mattie Braun by assassination would have materially assisted Goldheim to the fraudulent possession of those millions, for the revolutionary purpose you have intimated, would it be an Anarchist murder?"

"I suppose so."

"Go on with your story."

"The one suite of rooms in the Anarchist tenement I have spoken of is luxuriously furnished, and has from time to time been occupied by Goldheim and his daughter under the name of Wolfgang."

"Ah!"

"And it is the intention to secrete the young lady there, until terms can be made with Mrs. Traitner and the London lawyer for her surrender. That is all."

"And quite enough. What name does the great Anarchist tenement go by?"

"By the name of a great fortress, given to it by the police, from the difficulty of pursuing a quest successfully among its intricacies. They call it the Cronstadt."

"One thing more. The boy, Elmer—have you any idea where he is?"

"I have not."

"That will do. We are nearing our destination. Bear in mind, in what follows, that my revolver constantly covers you from behind."

The enslaved giant shrugged his shoulders, but there was little doubt of his docility, at least for the time being.

Long before this it had grown broad daylight, and the train was now at the Hunter's Point station, its terminus.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RESCUE—A REVELATION.

As Goldheim and his party, which still numbered a body-guard of at least twenty foreign ruffians, with Angela and Janet in their midst, trooped out upon the platform, they turned expectantly to the Express car, whence, much to Goldheim's astonishment at least, only issued Earnst Mandel, closely followed by the *pseudo* Hans and Yawcoop.

It being still so early in the morning, the depot was otherwise practically deserted.

"Where is the rest of 'em?" impatiently demanded the innkeeper of Mandel.

Prompted by Nixey's voice in his ear, and the concealed but palpable point of Nixey's revolver in the small of his back, the Great Bear growlingly answered:

"Gone on before, sir. I thought it best to make sure."

"Good enough!" said the innkeeper, with a relieved air. "They are probably on the tug by this time. Follow me—and you, Earnst, bring up the rear."

"Oho!" thought the detective, as this maneuver was put into operation; "so it is to be a tug, instead of the ferry-boat."

And he anxiously nudged Smithers to be on the alert, while keeping his own eyes open and pulling the strings of the great live puppet upon whose fidelity doubtless so much depended.

Angela and Janet had proceeded without demur, upon seeing no persons upon whom an appeal for aid would be likely to make much impression.

The latter carried a good-sized bundle, which was the only resemblance to baggage anywhere seen, and presently the detective had the satisfaction of catching her eye, and receiving an intelligent glance in return.

He saw her whisper to Angela, when a glad light also leaped into the young girl's saddened face.

But at this stage of the strange procession, which had by this time reached half-way to a little-frequented dock, at which a large tug was puffing impatiently, the watchful Sophie Goldheim seemed to notice something queer in Earnst Mandel's automaton-like bearing, as she looked back and saw him bringing up the rear, with the disguised Nixey and Smithers haunting his steps like veritable attendant sprites.

In fact, the subjection of the poor Great Bear to another's will was so unique that at this mo-

ment his mind was in a whirl, and he hardly knew that his soul was his own.

Nor was the substitution of one form of tyranny for another altogether distasteful, considering how of late the giant had vainly struggled against the toils and dangers which his connection had been weaving around him.

In other words, he had long felt himself out of his depth, and here was a new footing at last, if but a temporary one, in the hope for immunity which Nixey's threats had tacitly held out to him.

"Why do you remain back there, Earnst!" she called out patently. "You look like a trusted grenadier!"

"Thank you!" growled the Colossus, wholly of his own volition this time. "I am very well where I am."

"But come here to me."

Nixey saw that he could not continue to hold him to the spot without exciting suspicion.

"Go to her, then," he whispered. "But remember, I am a dead shot, and my eye will be on you."

"No need of that, perhaps," muttered Earnst, turning toward him with an odd look on his broad face. "I'm mighty tired of the Goldheim regime."

"If we can only have won the big rascal to our side," thought Nixey, "I shall be willing to let bygones be bygones in his case."

They had now reached the tug without an open demonstration, and Angela was seen to cast a despairing glance about her as the party prepared to board the tug.

"What! Shall we go, too?" whispered Smithers, in surprise.

"Yes," was the detective's response. "There is no help for it. As yet, they are ten to one against us, and there is not a policeman in sight."

"But—"

"No 'buts,' old fellow, stick to me, and keep your eye peeled."

"I'm with you to the death, sir. But to be in mid-stream with those ruffians, in case of detection! Have you thought of that?"

"Yes, and of everything else; though I confess I would feel easier if Elmer were but here."

All were now on board, and the tug, which was named the *Mansfield*, lost no time in putting out into the stream.

She was an old-fashioned excursion steamer razed for draught and freighting, with a single long main deck, partly roofed by the pilot-house bridge amidships, and with a small cabin space abaft either wheel-house, much after the manner of a primitive ferry-boat.

Goldheim seemed to draw a long breath, as of extra relief, getting well away from the shore, though he kept apart with the ladies near the starboard cabin.

Nixey gave whispered directions to Smithers to go above and sound the pilot, and let him know the result.

He then edged as near to the Goldheim group as he dared, with his eyes fastened upon Earnst Mandel, whom Sophie was seeking to engage in conversation, though apparently little to his liking.

To tell the truth, the detective had by this time less fears of rebellion on the *Polander's* part than of the pumping process to which Sophie's woman's wit might subject him unawares to himself.

At this juncture, much to the detective's satisfaction, a sudden lurch of the boat caused some confusion on board, and while it ensued, Janet managed to separate herself from her young companion and approach his side.

She touched his hand, and gave him a look, but no more.

"What is your plan?" she whispered, without moving her lips, and looking unconcernedly in another direction. "Be careful."

His answer was no less guarded.

"My plan is to give the alarm and signal for help as soon as we touch the New York dock, if not before should the opportunity occur."

"Desperate as is the chance, the mid-stream were the better risk, I think."

"Why?"

"Goldheim has arranged to reach an east side pier at an hour when it will be swarming with Anarchists about to embark for a holiday excursion. They are solidly devoted to him. A whole platoon of police would be powerless to respond to your alarm before Angela could be spirited away."

Nixey was about to answer when they both became aware that Sophie was looking directly toward them, while laughing and talking with Earnst Mandel.

However, she soon looked in another direction, as though unsuspecting of anything out of the way, and then Smithers returned to Nixey's side from his errand to the pilot-house.

"The pilot is also the captain," he whispered as soon as he got the chance. "He is ignorant of Goldheim's designs, but has been paid a heavy price for his fidelity, no matter what turns up."

This was dubious news, to say the most of it, and the detective's countenance fell.

But Smithers had a more important item in reserve.

"There's a boat steaming this way from the

direction of the Brooklyn Bridge," he whispered.

"What of that?"

"I have examined her through the captain's telescope."

"Well?"

"She is loaded with men."

"What more?"

"The men are blue-coats, and she is the police patrol steamer."

Nixey could hardly repress an exclamation of joy.

It seemed to him plain enough that the detachment on the patrol-boat were on the lookout for this very Anarchist excursion, on which Goldheim was depending so greatly, and if he could only succeed in communicating with them before reaching the shore, it would seem that nothing could better simplify the whole affair.

He sent Smithers back to the pilot-house for further observations, and presently managed to communicate what he had heard to Janet.

Her eyes sparkled.

"Oh!" she murmured, still keeping her eyes everywhere save upon him she was addressing, "Heaven grant that the patrol-boat come within hail!"

"If I had only Elmer with me," muttered the detective, voicing his inmost thought.

"Has he been so helpful, then?"

"Helpful! The boy is a paragon! And I love him, too!"

"Love him?"

The sudden blood mantled Janet's fair face.

"Yes; and if the boy lives he will make a glorious detective. Can you imagine what has become of Elmer, Janet?"

"Hush! Miss Goldheim is again looking this way."

"I think you are mistaken, though the Great Bear certainly looks as if she were making it decidedly warm for him."

"I am not mistaken. Do not hazard another word."

"But Elmer?"

"He may be nearer than you think—on board now!"

"Impossible! What! here, and I not know it?"

But Janet had hurriedly glided back to Angela's side, at the door of one of the little cabins.

Sophie was also looking straight at the detective, with a leveled, suspicious gaze, while Earnst Mandel was appearing greatly flushed and worried.

"She has pumped or half-pumped him," thought Nixey, making ready for desperate work.

Just then Janet was seen to disappear, with her bundle, through the cabin door behind her.

Here, too, Nixey caught Smithers's signal from the upper deck, to the effect that the patrol-boat was rapidly approaching.

But it was now too late, or almost so.

"Treason!" suddenly called out the innkeeper's daughter, pointing toward Nixey. "Father, we are betrayed! Look to that man! He is other than he seems!"

The detective tore off his disguising blouse and hat, and, revolver in hand, sprang to join Smithers, who was now signaling the patrol for all he was worth.

Instantly all was riot, confusion and dismay.

"Kill him!" yelled the chief conspirator, in an agony of fury and trepidation. "It is Nixey the detective, our deadliest foe! A hundred dollars for the first man who shoots him dead!"

Then, as Angela shrieked, and a score of deadly weapons flashed to light, Goldheim drew a large revolver, and leveled it at Nixey's head.

But Elmer Faithful, at that instant slipping out of the cabin into which Janet Aylmer had vanished, knocked up the murderer's hand as the weapon was discharged, and the boy's fearless clutch was on the innkeeper's throat, his own pistol clapped to the innkeeper's ear.

"Nixey to the rescue!" cried the well-remembered musical voice from those boyish but indomitable lips. "Goldheim, call off your Anarchist bell-hounds, for I hold your life in the hollow of my hand—in the twitch of my trigger-finger!"

But the revelation that had suddenly burst upon Goldheim and others—upon Sophie, Angela, Earnst Mandel, Nixey and Smithers at the same instant—was even more momentous and paralyzing than the cleverness of this opportune interposition.

It was a revelation which may have occurred to the reader ere this—namely, that Janet Aylmer and the boy Elmer were one and the same person!

Sophie was especially maddened by this discovery.

"Wretch!" she screamed. "Have even I been duped?"

Regardless of the fact that her father's life might be the penalty, she was springing at the boy detective's throat, with her finger-nails as her only weapons, when the Great Bear dragged her back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Earnst, with a world of satisfaction in his tremendous laugh. "Ho, ho, ho! Respect for your own sex, my she dragon, or I'll pare your claws for you! As well give in, Goldheim, for your jig is up. Ha, ha, ha!"

Sophie, gnashing her teeth, turned on him like a wounded tigress, but was only squirmingly powerless in his massive grasp.

The innkeeper, with the boy detective's pistol still probing his left ear, was almost equally impotent.

But the wild spirits under his sway, irrespective of his ticklish predicament, were by this time perfectly infuriated.

With a tumultuous roar, they made a rush for the upper deck where Nixey and Smithers were posted, the latter still signaling the patrol-boat, which was now almost within hailing distance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NIXEY'S COUP-DE-GRACE.

NIXEY'S cocked revolver was in his hand, his lips were set, his gloomy eyes aglint with their steeliest, deadliest light.

"Call off your dogs, Goldheim!" he shouted. "Their blood be on your head!"

"Never!" snarled the innkeeper, the brute courage of the man wholly uppermost now. "Curse you! Bernard Nixon, you triumph not yet over Arnold Wolfgang, the Anarchist hero!"

Suddenly eluding the bullet of the boy detective (as we shall still call Janet for the nonce) which, however, plowed a furrow in his scalp, he bounded forward.

In an instant, followed by three of his most stalwart henchmen, he was on the frail upper-deck, rushing upon Nixey like an avalanche.

But that effort was his last.

"Fire not a shot!" shouted Nixey. "Signal the police boat, but do nothing more!"

Then, slipping to one side, his terrible Nip suddenly shut down upon Goldheim and his foremost companion, and they were as in a vise.

The third fell, as if shot, with a blow between the eyes from his disengaged right hand, which dropped its pistol to deliver it, and then, reaching out, closed upon the fourth desperado's neck.

Here this portion of the upper deck gave way, but the detective was equal to the emergency.

Flinging the third captive into the grip of his left hand, which then shut around the necks of the three, stretching to an apparently incredible capacity to perform the feat, and lurching the men together like radishes in a twist, he suddenly caught a halyard with his right hand as the deck gave way, and bung there, smiling, with his triple prey in hand, like slain game-birds dangling from a hunter's belt.

It was in this position that he was introduced to the policemen, who were now hard aboard, and to whom both Smithers and Elmer were busily explaining the situation.

The ringing cheer with which the stalwart blue-coats greeted the exploit was a cheerful offset to the consternation into which it had thrown the miserable Anarchists.

As the detective dropped his prey, and then leaped lightly to the main deck, a well-remembered and beloved figure sprang with outstretched hand along with many others from the patrol-boat.

"What!" murmured the young man; "can it really be you, Mr. Heron?"

Hawk Heron, for it was indeed he, laughed gayly, as he clasped the youth's hand.

"Yes," said he. "I arrived from Europe but yesterday. On board the steamer I made friends with a certain Mr. Sloat of London. Can't you guess the rest?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, he had been telegraphed for by Mrs. Traitner, and he told me all the particulars of this affair in which you are engaged. My presence on the patrol boat is, however, wholly accidental, for I merely chanced along at the invitation of some of my old brother officers. Courage, my boy! you have won your spurs bravely in the detective service, and a great future is before you, should you stick to the profession. I am proud of you!"

All resistance was now at an end, and the police, upon information received chiefly from Smithers, were already in possession of the tug.

"Praise from the Falcon Detective is praise indeed!" said Nixey, with becoming diffidence.

"But to yonder boy equally belongs the credit of this man-hunt of mine."

He pointed to Elmer.

But the latter, blushing like a rose, and followed by Angela, at this moment darted into the little cabin.

Nixey then gave to his patron a few more words of explanation.

It was Janet Aylmer, not the boy Elmer, who presently reappeared from the cabin, when they were both formally introduced to Mr. Heron, who had, naturally enough, been impressed by the extraordinary beauty of the young heiress.

"Clarissa must know her," he said, in a low voice. "Would you mind my accompanying you with her to Mrs. Traitner's house?"

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," said Nixey.

Here the police captain in charge came up with Mr. Goldheim, whom he had taken into custody.

Sophie stood near, looking deserted but defiant, for Earnst Mandel had retired a few

paces, and was eying both father and daughter with resentful looks.

The police captain addressed himself respectfully to Nixey.

"The charge against this man," said he, indicating Goldheim, "is abduction, as I understand it."

"One charge, yes," said Nixey.

"Since the abduction took place in New York, I then place him under arrest," said the officer. "Your comrade, Smithers, has explained many things to me, Mr. Nixey. Is that person to be included in the arrest?"

He indicated Mandel.

The latter grinned broadly, but made no appeal for leniency.

"I make no charge against that man," said Nixey, after a moment's hesitation.

"How about this person?" And the officer indicated Miss Goldheim.

Nixey's hesitation was increased ten-fold.

But he exasperatedly recalled what Angela had suffered at Sophie's hands, and was decided.

"She assisted," said he, briefly.

Sophie, without altering a muscle, stepped, in obedience to the officer's nod, to her wretched father's side, pale but self-possessed.

"Will abduction be the only charge?" asked the officer.

"The only charge!" exclaimed the detective.

"Why, apart from this man and girl having repeatedly attempted my assassination by knife, bullet and dynamite, they are the mainspring of all the Anarchist villainy hatching in New York, besides being in constant correspondence with Anarchists in Chicago and elsewhere! This can be proven!"

"Still, this is a trifle vague," said the officer.

But this did not prevent a newspaper reporter, who was present, from hungrily noting down everything that was being said or done.

The officer still interrogated Nixey, while fixing his official side-glance on the father and daughter, now in custody.

"This is all then, I suppose," said he. "Or is there yet another charge against these persons?"

Nixey drew a long breath.

"It is not all," said he. "There is yet another charge, graver than any thus far made."

There was an impressive silence.

"What additional charge do you make against them?"

"The murder of Mattie Braun, at Staylesbridge, Connecticut."

The majority of those present were astounded, for the murder mystery of Staylesbridge had not ceased to be a subject of national interest.

Both Goldheim and his daughter burst out with indignant protestations of their innocence, but were at length silenced.

"It is my duty to arrest you," said the police captain, sternly addressing the prisoners.

"Solely, at present, on the charge of having abducted the young lady, Miss Angela Traitner, from her home and restrained her of her liberty. If this other terrible charge against you is formally made, you will be held in readiness for a requisition from the Governor of the State of Connecticut."

"That will be forthcoming speedily enough," said Hawk Heron's novice. "Have no fear of that."

By this time the two boats, which had been proceeding side by side, had approached the New York shore, and in a short time Goldheim and his daughter were hurried away to prison.

No other arrests were made, the Anarchist smaller fry melting mysteriously away amid the sizzling and restless inmates of the great Metropolitan frying-pan soon after the landing was effected.

It was at this point that Angela and her deliverer for the first time came together, after the exciting incidents we have described.

A strange, but perhaps natural, diffidence was upon both.

"You have been simply heroic, sir," said the young girl, casting down her eyes. "I owe you a debt of gratitude that I can never repay."

"Speak not of gratitude, when to have served you at all is the most priceless reward of my heart," replied the young man, with even less assurance. "And as for the obligation, it is scarcely less due to the heroic young lady at your side than to myself."

Janet blushed painfully as Angela, with tears in her lovely eyes, turned and seized her hands.

"Now let me interpose a little," said Hawk Heron, stepping forward with a smile. "For an hour or two at least, Nixey, these young ladies will be Mrs. Heron's guests at her hotel, which is not far away. This will give you time to make yourselves more presentable, and we can then proceed in a body to give good Mrs. Traitner and the London lawyer such a surprise as they have never known before."

This line of proceeding was carried out to the letter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REWARD.

NEARLY a week had elapsed, and Bernard Nixon was preparing to quit his humble lodgings, in New York, for Mrs. Traitner's aristocratic house, under painful circumstances, which he was none the less resolved to face.

What had taken place during that eventful period, whose particularization has been evaded?

Many things.

The Goldheims, father and daughter, were at last in a Connecticut jail, under indictment charging them jointly with the murder of the poor girl, theretofore known as Mattie Braun.

But her identification as Angela Braunfels's elder sister had been fully established, and the public sensation over Angela's abduction and rescue had already given place to renewed interest in the heinous crime with which our story opened, and whose many complications have woven the narrative with varied incidents and adventure.

The conviction of the Goldheims is a foregone conclusion, though their trial is yet to come off.

The cloud had at last been permanently lifted from the humble Aylmer household, and the whilom gardener of the Staylesbridge Hotel was in better and more profitable employment in the county town of N—.

Janet Aylmer had returned at once to her parents at the close of her brief but remarkable career in the dual character of Elmer Faithful and her own, but was now visiting Angela, as the young girl's constant and bosom companion.

But she could not escape the amazing notoriety which the newspapers had insisted upon her sharing with Nixey, the Detective, Nixey, the Novice, or Nixey, the Nipper, as the young hero's fame had by this time been variously embalmed in the criminal records of the day; and for once, at least, the actual adventures here transcribed had needed no exaggeration to render them all the sensation-loving public could imagine or desire.

In their case, indeed, the unvarnished truth had proved more wonderful than the most improbable fiction, and, side by side with the redoubtable Nixey's Nip, the touching story of Elmer's Devotion was destined to go down to fame.

The Staylesbridge tragedy is, practically, no longer a mystery, though the revelations that have so strangely intertwined it with the Anarchist plottings in the bosom of our land, and indirectly with those that have so recently and disastrously culminated in Chicago, must ever invest the crime with a singularity and importance more or less national.

Bernard Nixon may have been diverted from his medical career, but, with his present reputation, so early won, so hardly earned, his future is secure.

Love, also, was his, the peerlessly beautiful young girl of his idolization having testified unmistakably to a reciprocation of his consuming, yet elevating, passion.

Why, then, was it under such painful circumstances that he was now about setting forth to visit the charming idol of his heart?

Because, it was perhaps to be for the last time, and this meeting was in all probability to signalize their separation, never again to meet as lovers meet on this green earth of God's munificence and love—a separation that, in the cheerless materialistic view at least, might be eternal!

Mrs. Traitner had finally expressed herself to that stunning effect.

The obscurity, and inferential ignominy of the brilliant young man's extraction had been set up as an insurmountable bar to his marriage with Angela Braunfels, herself a waif of charity for the greater part of her young life, but now the legalized sole heir of Jeremiah Jekyll's English millions.

Much as the good old lady acknowledged the intrinsic merit and superlative worth of Nixey, she had sadly but firmly indicated that obstacle to the otherwise desirable union in unmistakable terms.

The objection had received the support of Mr. Sloat, the London solicitor, together with that of a majority of the young girl's rich and influential friends, whose number now was legion; and there could be but little doubt that Angela would finally acquiesce in the general verdict, of her heart's budding happiness, if not of her very life itself.

Mrs. Withers, the Gypsy magnate, had been repeatedly but vainly appealed to for the unavailing of the obscurity that enveloped the young man's birth. Angry at the failure of those Goldheim plottings, in which she had been indirectly interested, she had remained adamant to both present entreaties and prospective bribes, and Nixey had come to the sorrowful conclusion that any further visits to her fortune-teller's den would be time and patience thrown away.

"Where is Smithers?" he asked of his landlady, when quitting his lodgings on the occasion of this perhaps last visit to the home of his beloved.

Smithers was still with him, having received a promise of permanent employment at the Government Barge office, through Mr. Hawk Heron's kindly influence.

Nixey's landlady smiled.

"Gone to see his lady-love, as usual, I suppose, sir," was her reply. "The Gypsy enchantress don't seem to give Mr. Smithers much chance

for anything else but dancing attendance on her."

"Much good may it do him!" muttered the detective; and, with his heart full of sad bitterness, he went his way.

Smithers had been making love to Meeta at her grandmother's house with some degree of success so far as the fair Gypsy herself was concerned, though with nothing but furious opposition on the part of her royal relative.

"The poor old fellow will probably have no better luck than I in the long run, I fancy," was Nixey's reflection. "But I hope it may be otherwise, for Meeta is a good girl, doubtless worthy of the old sailor's devotion, if her grandmother is the unprincipled sphinx that I have found her."

But, much to his mystification, on his arrival at Mrs. Traitner's house, that lady was in the act of being hurriedly driven away in a public conveyance, with none other than Mr. Smithers himself as an escort.

The latter merely took time to nod to Nixey, with an odd and inscrutable smile on his weather-beaten face, as he disappeared, and Mrs. Traitner was looking flurried and distressed.

"What can it all mean?" thought the detective, as he entered the house.

But here his mystification was increased.

Angela was in the drawing-room with Mr. and Mrs. Hawk Heron, who had already become profoundly attached to the beautiful girl, and who now arose to welcome Nixey with something like a reflection of Smithers's odd smile in their kindly faces.

"Be of good heart, my boy," said the ex-detective, warmly pressing the young man's hand while passing to the door. "The darkest hour is ever the precursor of the brightest dawn."

Mrs. Heron—our old friend, the still radiantly beautiful Clarisse—also tendered Nixey her sympathetic hand.

"Remember," said she, even yet more enigmatically, "how in the old Kotzka days we schemed, fought, struggled, almost despaired, and yet gained the day!"

And they unceremoniously quitted the room, leaving the lovers alone together.

Nixey did not venture to clasp Angela to his heart, as he longed to do. They had met, not to hope but to part, and the beautiful creature was as drooping and unhappy as he.

"What does it all mean?" he asked, timidly taking her hand, but at once relinquishing it after leading her to a seat.

"I do not know," was her spiritless and indifferent response.

"But you must have remarked something strange, if not significant, in their looks."

"Yes, I remarked it."

"And Mrs. Traitner just hurried away from the house in a hackney coach with my man, Smithers."

"I believe she did."

"But Angela, what can it all mean? Can't you explain it?"

She covered her face, and began to weep; softly, undemonstratively, but none the less hopelessly.

Angela cared to explain nothing, since the fact remained, as she thought, that this was to be her last interview with her lover, that at its close they were to see each other never again.

Nixey was infinitely distressed, but he was also heroic. He did not wildly rave against their hard fate, for that would have been useless. He did not clasp the lovely weeper in his arms, and make the most of these wild last moments in the treasuring of kisses and endearments that were soon, as he deemed, to exist in memory alone; for that would have been false to the promise he had made to Mrs. Traitner on her vouchsafing him this last interview with his beloved, and to betray the confidence she had reposed in him.

He tried to charm away Angela's tears with dreary attempts at lively talk upon indifferent topics; he tried to cheer her heart with pictured visions of the home of wealth and ease that was to be hers in England, even while his own heart was breaking in his breast; he tried to bear up as best he might solely that he might relieve her of but a fragment of her misery and pain.

How the dreary hour that they thus passed together was spent he never knew; but there was an end, and such a joyful end, of it all, that seemed like the sudden transition from purgatory into celestial bliss.

A carriage, furiously driven, was heard to stop at the street door.

A moment later, Mrs. Traitner came into the parlor.

She was accompanied by Mr. Sloat and Mr. and Mrs. Heron, all looking very excited and happy, while Smithers brought up a jubilant rear-guard to the new arrival.

The old lady, Mrs. Traitner herself, was as pale as death, but with a new and strange light in the bright little eyes that twinkled behind the familiar gold-bowed spectacles.

"My son!" she cried, tottering feebly forward, and opening her arms to Nixey. "My lost child, restored at last to my heart! Oh, it is all true! You are mine, mine again!"

The young man understood it all in an intuitive flash.

Mother and son were folded in each other's arms!

And how had it all come about?

The explanation was at hand.

Stricken with apoplexy a few hours before, and warned that her hours were numbered, Mrs. Withers, the Gypsy child-stealer, had relented at last.

Escorted by Smithers, whom chance had made the messenger of death and life, of revelation and joy, Mrs. Traitner had hurried to the bedside of the dying fortune-teller, taking up Mr. Sloat on the way.

The death-bed revelation had been as brief as it was satisfactory, and ample proofs had been given that Bernard Nixon, the whilom street waif, the self-made young man, was none other than the same that had been stolen from Mrs. Traitner's side in St. Louis nineteen years before.

"Come," said Clarisse Heron, when the transports of the reunited mother and son had in a measure subsided. "I think it is about time that yet another reunion should be ratified right here."

And she led the lovers together with her brightest smile.

"Yes," said Mr. Sloat, "I think we must all agree that there is no longer danger of any *mesalliance* here."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALL SERENE.

THE lovers had again been alone for an hour in the afternoon of that same eventful day when Angela arose:

"I must leave you now, my darling," said she.

Her lover imprisoned her hands afresh.

"But I am to remain for the entire evening," he exclaimed. "You heard Mrs. Traitner—I mean my mother—insist upon it."

"I did hear her."

"Why, then, must you leave me?"

"Some one else would see you."

"Who is it?"

Angela's sweet eyes filled with sympathetic tears.

"Can you not guess? Some one whose farewell must mingle with our bliss—whose loss has become my gain."

He partly understood now, and a moment later, when Janet Aylmer stood with him alone, a variety of painful and contending emotions surged in the young man's otherwise triumphant breast.

Janet was attired for a journey, for she was that evening to return to her parents' home.

As she stood there, with half-averted face, brave in her blonde comeliness, statuesque in her noble maidenhood and grace, the young man realized to the full how much he was indebted to her heroism and devotion.

"Farewell, sir!" said she at last, extending her hand, with the sweet, resigned smile that he had so often wondered at in the boy Elmer's face, but which was a mystery no more. "You are happy at last, and I—am glad."

He took her hand.

"My friend—my more than friend!" he exclaimed. "You also will be happy; the future must have its rewards in store for you."

She had begun to shake her head in deprecation of his prophecy, but paused, with a brave, set look that went beyond and past him, perhaps somewhere into that unknown future whose happenings no man can foresee.

"Yes, Bernard," she said, softly, "the future may have its rewards, though not of the kind that you would predict for me."

"What do you mean?"

"Time will show."

"But do be frank with me, my friend? Has Earnst Mandel—the penitent, and let us hope, reclaimed Earnst—been renewing the offer of his hand and love?"

She made a slightly impatient gesture. "Speak not of love!" she murmured, a slight blush tinging the pure pallor of her face.

But Nixey, being a man, was without tact in such things.

"I always said I thought there was something excellent in the big fellow," he went on, heedlessly. "He has just come into a little fortune, I hear, and he, moreover, loves you to distraction, Janet—"

"Oh, have done, sir!"

Her face was wreathed with anguish, and now he understood what should have been plain to him before.

The love of a heart like Janet's, once given, whether fortunately or otherwise, holds no moiety in reserve; its venture is either triumph or shipwreck.

"Forgive me," he murmured, penitently bowing his head.

She smiled brightly.

"We will talk of that future for itself alone, then," said she. "Have you not often said to me, though perhaps not in any but my borrowed character"—and she blushed more rosily at the recollection of her male disguise—"that I would make a capital detective?"

"What!" he cried, eagerly; "are you then contemplating a detective's career?"

"If a woman's work, who knows what the future may unfold?"

"It is a noble field," said the young man, enthusiastically, "and a woman such as you, Janet, may shine in it with the best of us."

She smiled again.

"It may be so, and then there would be a fresh romance of adventure, with Faithful Elmer as its hero."

He laughed.

"Say, rather," said he, gayly, "with Jaeset's Devotion as its living plot and thread."

She again put out her hand.

He bent over it.

As he did so, her lips, with just the phantom of a kiss, brushed his pale forehead; there was no treason to Angela, but only the whisper of the might-have-been in the giving and taking of that pure kiss, and she was gone.

A moment later, and Angela, accompanied by Mrs. Traitner, together with Hawk Heron and Clarisse hurried into the room.

"There is wonderful news!" cried the young girl. "Mr. Smithers is the bearer of it."

Then Smithers rushed in, waving an evening newspaper over his head.

"It's the latest out!" he cried. "Meeta just told me of it, and I came here on the jump as soon as I could crib the latest edition."

"But what is the news?" cried Nixey.

"Here you are—full particulars! Goldheim found dead in his cell, after hanging himself, and leaving a written confession of the murder of Mattie Braun, in which, however, he solemnly exculpates his daughter of any participation in the crime."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and there's more, too!"

"More?"

"Simultaneously with the discovery of the suicide, Sophie Goldheim was found to have mysteriously escaped from the prison, leaving not a trace behind." The exact words of the reporter. Here, read 'em for yourself!"

Nixey snatched the paper; but, apart from the details, there was little more to be learned than the eloquent facts as related by the exuberant Smithers.

Nor has anything been learned since then, beyond what was contained in the criminal innkeeper's rather meager confession.

Goldheim sleeps in his dishonored grave; Sophie has faded into the interesting obscurity of "mysterious disappearances;" the murder of "Mattie Braun" is no longer a mystery, and has been avenged, though not upon the public scaffold.

In less than a month, Angela and Nixey were happily married.

Nixey was ere this well-to-do in his own right, but, for all that, the wedding tour of the young couple was first directed to England, for the purpose of Angela being formally installed in the possession of the Jekylls millions.

They were accompanied by Mrs. Traitner, under Mr. Sloat's especial protection, and among those who wished them *bon voyage* from the steamer's dock were Hawk Heron and Clarisse, together with Smithers and Meeta, the latter having been made one a week before.

"There go," was Smithers's parting ejaculation, "the loveliest bride and the deservin'est bridegroom that ever slipped anchor for a fair-weather voyage on board the good ship Honey Moon!"

"I agree with you, my dear," said his own bride, with a sparkle of her roguish black eyes.

"Present company excepted, I feel a sort of kinship for Nixey, the bridegroom, in particular; for, by his complexion and his ways, he's more a Gypsy that ought else, and blood will tell."

"A fair life-voyage to Angela, the bride, then!" said Hawk Heron; "for assuredly without Nixey's heroism she would not be taking it."

"Let us not, however, forget one prime characteristic," said Clarisse, smiling, "without which even the young bridegroom's heroism were incomplete indeed."

"What is that?"

"Nixey's Nip!"

THE END.

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